Yevgeni BUGAYENKO

On the Bank of the Amur

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HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Jewish Autonomous Region, with an area of 36,000 square kilometres and a population of over 200,000, lies in the south of the Soviet Far East and is part of the Khabarovsk Territory of the Russian Federation, a large area totalling 824,600 square kilometres.

Birobijan can be reached from Khabarovsk by air in 40 minutes. In Khabarovsk a cold wind was blowing from the Amur and the spring clouds promised either rain or snow, while it was a sunny spring day in Birobijan. Schoolchildren ran along Sholom Aleichem Street in unbuttoned jackets and raincoats... The contrast with Khabarovsk comes as no surprise, because mountain ridges and forests protect the region, which lies on the same latitude as Prague, Vienna, Munich and Paris, from cold winds.

The forests which occupy a third of the region's territory abound in mushrooms, nuts and berries. The northern larch and southern wild grapes, the Amur cork tree and the regal lotus all grow here. The sable is the golden wealth of the forest. Add to it wild boar, elk, reindeer, Siberian stag, bear, fox, pheasant and grouse... There are one hundred and six species of fish, including salmon, the great Siberian sturgeon which may weigh up to a ton, salmon trout, carp and

pike, to be found in the mighty Amur which washes the region from the south and forms the frontier with the People's Republic of China.

It is best to begin one's acquaintance with any region with the museum of local lore, such as the one in Lenin Street in Birobijan.

The museum displays stuffed tigers and bears, the miracle-working ginseng root and its relative the eleutherococcus, and many other things: marble, brucite, coal... Geologists have discovered large deposits of tin, iron and other minerals, most of which are already being mined.

Next come the fruits of the earth: ears of wheat and soy beans, pears, apples, cherries, potatoes, tomatoes and cucumbers.

Conspicuous in the centre of the museum's main room is an enlarged photostat copy of the decree of the Central Executive Committee of the Soviet Union (the country's supreme body of authority until 1936) of May 7, 1934, which reads: "After considering the representation of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee on making the Birobijan Jewish National District the Jewish Autonomous Region, the USSR Central Executive Committee has decreed that the request be granted and that the Birobijan Jewish National District be made the Jewish Autonomous Region. Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR."

In pre-revolutionary Russia Jews were discriminated against and were allotted special areas in which to live; poor Jews were obliged to reside only in those areas. They were not allowed to farm or to work in factories.

The 1917 Great October Socialist Revolution swept away all these restrictions. The Soviet government gave Jews, together with other peoples and ethnic groups, freedom and equal rights.

Many of them wished to farm, and fertile land was available in the Amur area. The decree of the Presidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR of March 28, 1928, which is displayed at the museum, reads: "... to allot for settling by working Jews available lands along the Amur in the Far Eastern Territory, including the Birobijan district, roughly within the following boundaries: along the river Amur, west of the city of Khabarovsk as far as the mouth of the river Khingan and along the river Khingan as far as the railway; further, north of the railway to the east as far as the river Urmi and along the rivers Urmi and Tunguska, and eastward up to a line west of Khabarovsk... If settlement of the area is successful, working Jews should be given the opportunity to organize in the said area a Jewish national, administrative-territorial entity."

In the 1930s trains carrying volunteers sped eastwards as the result of an appeal by the Communist Party and the Soviet Government to build industrial centres at Magnitogorsk in the Urals and in Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur. Birobijan was built at the same time. Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and people of other nationalities went there with Jews to live and work in the new region.

The government provided the necessary equipment and building materials and granted each family a non-repayable loan to start a home.

The Jewish Autonomous Region was established on the principle of respect for working people irrespective of their nationality, on the principle of their fraternal cooperation and mutual assistance, and

observing all the rights prescribed by the Soviet Constitution for autonomous regions.

Mikhail Kalinin, Chairman of the USSR Central Executive Committee, said in this connection: "The government decision to make the Birobijan district of the Far Eastern Territory an Autonomous Jewish Region, was no empty one. Making the Birobijan district an autonomous region is of major economic significance for a rich and completely undeveloped area which has large deposits of ores, immense forest tracts and all other resources, including gold."

A photograph in the museum shows Russian peasant Kolesnikov teaching Mikhail Kogan, a young Jew, carpentry. Kogan later graduated from an engineering college and became the manager of an electric power station. Other photos show young men and women, graduates of a Moscow medical college, who came to work in Birobijan.

Some families settled near the Trans-Siberian Railway, others in the river valleys where Russian villages had stood for a long time, or founded new settlements, such as Amurzet and Birofeld.

This is how the small railway junction of Tikhonkaya became the settlement of Birobijan, which later became the administrative and industrial centre of the region, and how the town of Obluchye in the west of the region and the large villages of Waldheim and Bijan came into being.

Today the Jewish Autonomous Region has developed and growing industries and agriculture.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARK KAUFMAN

Mark Kaufman, vice chairman of the Jewish Regional Soviet of People's Deputies, is an old resident of Birobijan. On graduating from college, he worked as a foreman, engineer, head of a factory shop, chief engineer and then manager of a power transformer factory. He has proved an able specialist and manager.

His rule is to spend as little time as possible in his office and to meet people at factories, construction sites and at home as often as possible, in order to know more about what they need and what concerns them.

"I'm in charge of several economic sectors here, including construction," said Mark Kaufman. "There are a lot of construction projects in our region, and each year a considerable sum is spent on them. Our main problem is the shortage of skilled workers and technicians. We are building industrial enterprises, houses, schools and Houses of Culture. I can show you the scale of our construction."

Half an hour later we were speeding in a *Volga* car across Birobijan, bathed in brilliant sunlight. In the north-eastern part of the town we saw a multi-storied skeleton of reinforced-concrete slabs.

"This is the second section of a repair plant for machinery used on the BAM," Kaufman explained. (BAM—Baikal-Amur Mainline railway, being built in East Siberia and the Far East, 4,300 kilometres long.—*Ed.*). "The first section began operating in 1981 and repairs the powerful KrAZ and MAZ lorries. The state has invested 15 million roubles in the project. A construction and assembly train, complete

with skilled personnel and modern equipment was sent from Novosibirsk. We are building at the same time a housing estate, a school, kindergartens, a shop and a canteen for the workers."

Our *Volga* overtook powerful tip-up lorries carrying building materials and prefabricated parts.

"Today our Birobijan is a big construction site," Kaufman said with pride. "We are doing a great deal of building. This is the power transformer factory. The new shop has doubled the output. Next to it is a seven-storey engineering and laboratory building with a computer centre, with two of the latest computers. Today the factory manufactures twice as many transformers in a year as the whole country produced in 1940.

"We are also building many blocks of flats, cultural centres and schools. Now Birobijan is very different from what it was in the 1940s. We have moved nearly all the factories from the city centre to the outskirts. In their place we have planted gardens and built high-rise blocks of flats. The Builders' Stadium can be seen on the opposite side of the river. In our building we think in terms of whole neighbourhoods, not just separate houses or street blocks."

As we drove through Birobijan, I recalled what the city was like many years ago. Now new buildings stood on what five years ago had been waste ground. A new suburb had gone up here. Next to the children's hospital was a four-storey secondary school. There was also a new secondary medical school and its hostel, as well as a new cultural-and-education centre for 500 students, a hostel and a canteen.

Left of the bridge across the river, next to the Regional Party Committee, stood the imposing

building housing the design offices. A new House of Soviets and a post office had gone up on the bank of the river Bira and a nine-storey block of flats was under construction. A monument to Lenin had been erected in the square of the same name, designed by Academician Lev Kerbel. The car turned left and again we saw cranes, piles of bricks and more prefabricated cement blocks. Here a whole complex of buildings was going up on a 27-hectare area, including technical schools and houses for 10,000 people. Schoolchildren could use a new Palace of Young Pioneers complete with a gymnasium and swimming pool. A philharmonic society with a concert hall for a Jewish musical theatre was also being built.

When we returned to the Regional Executive Committee Mark Kaufman handed me a folder.

"Look at these figures," he said. "In the last three years construction facilities have been considerably extended in Birobijan; in particular, the large prefabricated parts factory is being modernized to increase its capacity 150 per cent.

"Large-scale construction is going on in the various districts of the Region: a six-hectare hothouse complex is being completed at the Birobijan State Farm not far from the city, the premises for another state farm, the Tselinny (Virgin-Land) are being built as well as a big livestock farm in Lenin District. Comfortable homes and cultural and social centres are being built all over the Region.

"The Soviet government pays great attention to the requests and suggestions of our Regional organizations and shows great concern for the Region's economic development and improvement of Birobijan's amenities. The Jewish Autonomous

Region has been awarded the Order of Lenin* and the Order of Peoples' Friendship for its economic achievements and for promoting fraternal relations among peoples."

AT THE OFFICES OF *BIROBIJANER SHTERN*

The offices and printing shop of two regional newspapers—*Birobijaner Shtern*, which has been published in Yiddish since 1930, and the *Birobijan Star* in Russian are located in two buildings surrounded by poplars in Lenin Street, almost in the town's centre, opposite the public library and the museum of local lore. The two newspapers are written and edited separately and come out five days a week.

Leonid Shkolnik, editor-in-chief of *Birobijaner Shtern*, received me in his study. His editorial staff occupy a whole storey of the offices.

He is young. Only 12 years ago the newspaper printed an article signed Leonid Shkolnik, sixth-grade fitter at the Birobijan shoe factory. His childhood was not a happy one. He lost his father when he was a small boy, his mother was often ill, so at 16 Leonid decided he should go out to work. He attended an evening school and devoted few free hours to writing. His first poems appeared in a wall newspaper, then they were printed in the regional newspaper and a year later the Khabarovsk publishing house brought out a book of his poems.

He began to work on the newspaper as a correspondent, then department manager, then head of the secretariat and is now the editor-in-chief. He is as fond as ever of poetry, is preparing another book of verse and writes articles which are printed by his newspaper and various publishing agencies in Moscow.

* Top Soviet decoration established in 1930.

Leonid willingly agreed to tell me about his newspaper, but warned me that he would probably be interrupted often because the newspaper's front page was just being set. A lot of interesting material had been supplied by local journalists, TASS and the Novosti Press Agency.

I asked Leonid to tell me about the articles on his table and those he had already sent to the printers.

"This is material about the Anti-Zionist Committee of the Soviet Public," he said. "We all know that in its global strategy imperialism makes wide use of Zionism as a shock force for attacking socialism and the national liberation movement, the forces of peace and social progress. We get many letters from our readers denouncing the anti-popular actions of the Zionist leaders and rejecting all forms of chauvinism. Soviet Jews live as one family with other nationalities. This can be seen in our Region: at factories and mills, general and specialized schools, collective and state farms, Jews and Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians work and study together and help one another in a brotherly way.

"Here is an article with comments on the decisions of the Executive Committee of the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies. What is of interest there?" Leonid scanned the typewritten pages. "During the first four months of 1983 labour productivity growth was 3.5 per cent and 200 new flats have been built in Birobijan to be distributed free of charge. But we

believe that more could have been built and criticize our building organizations. Here's a report on how the sowing is going in Amurzet, both with praise and criticism. Then here is an interview with the manager of the construction trust engaged in building facilities for new farms on formerly fallow land, who talks about the progress in building a mechanized livestock farm.

"We've just got this report about the forthcoming session of the Regional Soviet of People's Deputies which will consider ways of improving the work of service establishments. It will go on the front page.

"This folder contains material on sundry matters. A woman from the town of Obluchye writes that there is a shortage of good toys in the local shop. Another problem: aerated water machines are out of order in a vegetable shop, so a reader asks the manager of the town trading department to explain why this is so.

"Our correspondents write about the voluntary work being done at the knitted-goods factory, the workers' meeting at the wall materials factory, about new books, and so on...

"In general," Shkolnik says, "our newspaper seeks to inform its readers of events in the Jewish Autonomous Region, in the Soviet Union and abroad, it strives to serve as a spokesman for the Region's people irrespective of their nationality—Jews or Russians, Kazakhs or Mordvinians.

"We often publish stories of individual people's lives. We have a column titled 'A Camera's View of the Region' describing the changes in the Jewish Autonomous Region, the new projects and the life of people in general.

"Most of the articles in the newspaper are con-

tributed by our readers: workers, collective farmers, teachers and public figures. There are quite a lot of them: each department of our newspaper has scores of regular contributors. The editorial board holds seminars and conferences for these authors to improve their journalistic skills."

Roman Shoikhet, head of the newspaper's agricultural department, was born in the Ukraine and came to the Jewish Autonomous Region as an adult. He began to write stories and essays for newspapers, then, like Shkolnik, he was offered a permanent job on the newspaper. He is the author of two books—*Grain Growers* and *Native Land*, a member of the Soviet Writers' Union and chairman of the regional literary association.

Shoikhet is not a Party member, while his colleague Mikhail Kul, deputy editor-in-chief, is a Communist and before joining the newspaper's editorial board was the manager of the Babstov state farm; Leonid Gelberg, the senior correspondent in the industrial and transport department, used to be a fitter at the power transformer factory.

Nina Voronina is just beginning her working life. After finishing secondary school she worked as a typist at the editorial board and tried to write reports and articles for the newspaper. She is taking a correspondence course at the journalism department of the Far Eastern State University and is a correspondent for the newspaper's cultural department.

The people who founded the newspaper and worked on it until retirement age are respected and honoured.

Among the first editors of *Birobijaner Shtern* was the critic and publicist Genakh Kazakevich, and his

son Emmanuil Kazakevich, the well-known writer and winner of a State Prize for literature, published his first poems in that newspaper. Another popular writer who began his literary career here is Aron Vergelis, now the editor-in-chief of the Yiddish magazine *Sovietish Heimland*. David Bergelson, Der Nister and many others have published their work in the newspaper.

For many years the newspaper was edited by Naum Korchminsky who arrived in Birobijan from the town of Berdichev in the Ukraine. Here he graduated from a teacher training college, became the headmaster of a village school, and was then elected chairman of the Jewish Autonomous Region's teachers' trade union. He was always an active non-staff correspondent for *Birobijaner Shtern* and in 1955 was offered a permanent job on the newspaper as deputy editor-in-chief. A year later he became editor-in-chief. He is now retired.

Birobijaner Shtern circulates not only in the Jewish Autonomous Region. It is subscribed to by Jewish families in Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Riga, Kishinev and other Soviet cities and also abroad: in the United States, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Canada, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Britain, Denmark, Argentina, Federal Germany, Romania, Israel and other countries.

In the letters' department I was shown some of the recently received mail: journalist Linsky from Tel Aviv offered articles on international problems. A group of students and teachers from Frankfort on the Main asked for several copies of the new Yiddish primer which had been published in Khabarovsk for the schools in the Jewish Autonomous Region.

THE COMBINE HARVESTER BUILT IN BIROBIJAN

Twenty new combine harvesters, smelling of fresh paint, were standing on the square in front of the assembly shop. They were the latest model of the self-propelled caterpillar combine built by the Dalselmash farm-machinery plant to harvest rice and other grain crops on wet soil. The story of this harvester deserves special attention.

In the Far East the rainy season often begins when grain crops start to ripen. Ordinary wheel harvesters skid in such weather and leave deep ruts in the ground. The farmers needed a reliable machine for work on water-logged fields. The designers created a special high-mobility harvester with caterpillar tyres. It had been tested and put up a good performance. The harvester can reap grain crops as soon as the grain dries in ears, and on rice plantations, as soon as the water is drained.

In the postwar years Birobijan had a small factory building lorry and tractor trailers, and in 1960 it was expanded and became Dalselmash, the first farm machinery plant in the Far East.

The Birobijan harvester won a diploma for its high scientific and technical level at the USSR Exhibition of Economic Achievements and a silver medal at an international farm machinery show in Budapest. Specialists from many foreign countries showed an interest in the harvester.

Cuban farmers needed a reliable high-mobility machine for harvesting crops in wet conditions. The Cubans approached various countries making such harvesters and ordered one from each country to test them. Specialists from the manufacturing factories

also travelled to Cuba for the trials. As luck would have it, it rained heavily for several days, preventing all work. When the rain stopped the experts went out to the plantation and came to the unanimous conclusion that the harvesters could not be taken out into the fields because of the risk of getting bogged down. But the Soviet engineer from Birobijan, Alexei Untevsky, said that his harvester would be able to operate. Everybody laughed, yet Alexei was not joking. He got into the driver's seat and drove the harvester to the plantation. The machine worked normally, without skidding or leaving a deep rut. The Birobijan combine harvester was nicknamed the "Far Eastern cross-country harvester". Cuba bought large numbers of it. It was also purchased by Iraq, Iran, Mexico, Argentina, Vietnam, Hungary and other countries. Recently Bulgaria placed a large order for the machine.

The engineers at the chief design office developing farm machinery for East Siberia and the Far East, which is also in Birobijan, continue to improve the harvester. They have been steadily reducing its weight and building up the engine's horse-power and the capacity of the threshing unit. The plant has begun manufacturing a new model.

The plant's chief engineer Semyon Balak told me: "The new combine harvester differs from the previous models in that it threshes six kilograms of grain mass in a second instead of five kilograms, and its hopper has been increased to 4.5 cubic metres, or twice the former size. The engine's HP has been increased from 100 to 120. The running gear and the drive axle have been strengthened and control of the threshing unit has been made much easier and simpler. It has a bigger and more comfortable cab.

Control levers have been replaced with a steering wheel to make the driver's work easier.

"At the same time the plant is manufacturing another modernized combine for harvesting maize for silage on waterlogged fields. Its productivity has been increased by at least 20 per cent, the caterpillar tyres have been made more reliable, the speed of the silage cutter has been increased so that the green mass can be made into either silage or meal.

"In 1985 the plant intends to start manufacturing an entirely new all-purpose combine harvester producing fodder and silage. It will improve labour productivity and perform several related operations."

During our talk about new harvesters the chief engineer was often interrupted by telephone calls. From what he said over the phone I gathered that the plant's management had another urgent matter on its hands, that of modernization. Four bays of the main shop, a heat-treatment shop and shops to produce the track rollers and the guiding wheels of the caterpillar base are under construction. These are priority modernization jobs which are expected to double the output of combine harvesters, to make it 8,000 a year. The second stage of modernization is planned to be started in the nearest future.

In addition to the construction of new factory buildings, obsolescent equipment is being replaced in the shops, where automated and semi-automated production lines are being installed. Twenty-seven pre-set control machines have already started working.

Knowledgeable specialists and skilled workers are required to build the unique machinery and operate the latest equipment, and Birobijan has such people.

Take for instance Semyon Balak. His parents were among the first settlers in Birobijan; his father worked as a mechanic at a collective farm and his mother worked as a milkmaid. But they wanted their son to become an engineer, so when Semyon finished secondary school, he went to the Khabarovsk Polytechnical Institute. When he graduated he asked to be sent to work in Birobijan. At the Dalselmash farm machinery plant he began as a production engineer at the assembly shop, then was appointed shop superintendent, the plant's chief production engineer and finally chief engineer.

"I am satisfied with my life, I have an interesting and responsible job and I am confident of the future," he said.

Another example: Ivan Kubaryev grew up in a Russian family and has progressed from being an ordinary engineer to being the plant's manager.

Before the Second World War Radik Sandik lived with his parents in Lithuania. His father, an officer, was a political instructor at a frontier post. When the Nazis treacherously invaded the Soviet Union without declaring war, he was killed in the very first battle. The train evacuating the Sandik family was bombed by Nazi planes. His mother was wounded and her children, two-year-old Radik and his three-year-old sister, were hidden by a Lithuanian peasant, at the risk of his life. A year later their mother found them, but it was dangerous to live in the hamlet. Lithuanian partisans took the family to their forest.

After the war Radik's mother went to the Far East, where his father's relatives lived. After serving in the Army Radik remained in Riga, where he attended the polytechnical institute. He had studied for two years when his mother began to send him worried letters.

She complained of poor health and asked her son to come and live with her in Birobijan. So he went there, began to work as electrician at the Dalselmash plant and to take a correspondence course at the polytechnical institute in Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur.

Then Radik Sandik was the secretary of the Party committee at the Dalselmash plant; now he is the second secretary of the city Party committee.

He and I walked along the Avenue of Labour Glory, lined with huge portraits of the best workers and engineers. Here were: Rafail Khersonsky, a turner who represented the Jewish Autonomous Region in the USSR Supreme Soviet and has been awarded the Order of Lenin, Faina Belau, Nikolai Belonoga—Jews and Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians.

"People of different nationalities work at the plant and we never grant any advantages on grounds of nationality," said Radik. "We are all equal, we live and work as one family, one people. We are all Soviet people, one big, friendly family."

YEFIM LANTSMAN, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE WORKING CLASS

I first got to know Yefim Lantsman as it were by proxy. In the tiny office of the tool-making shop at the Dalselmash plant several people were arguing as to who was the best worker. Shop superintendent Anatoli Pobedinsky listed several names, but when he mentioned Yefim Lantsman there was a general stir. One could feel the man commanded great respect. I asked which aspects of his character and

which of his deeds his workmates considered typical. This is what I heard.

Anatoli Pobedinsky: "When I need to make very complicated, multiple-cavity moulds for casting rubber parts, I go to Yefim Lantsman. He works fast, without much ado, and, what is most important, cleanly and accurately. Another example: when any of the young workers misbehaves, a public organization's representative comes to our shop. Who do you think he goes to first of all? To Yefim Lantsman. The Communists of our shop, all very respected people, have elected Lantsman secretary of the shop Party organization for several years in a row. Lantsman commands great respect because, among other things, he sees everything he undertakes through."

Nikolai Belonoga: "I recall that once Yefim Lantsman and I were election canvassers in a settlement outside Birobijan. In one house we got talking to an old man about his life, about his worries, and he told us that he was not getting all of the pension he should have been entitled to because he had lost the documents proving his service record. It appeared before retirement that he had worked at other enterprise than the one where his last job was. Yefim Lantsman went to the city executive committee and to the regional social security office and persuaded the people there to make the necessary inquiries and look in the archives. All the papers were found and now the old man gets all of his pension."

Victor Markov, a turner: "Personally I respect Lantsman primarily for his open-heartedness and sincerity. He has been awarded the country's orders for exemplary work, he was elected a deputy to the local Soviet and now he is a member of the bureau

of the CPSU regional committee. With all these awards and general respect, he is not the least bit snobbish, he never boasts, never pushes himself and his merits forward. I have never heard him utter a rude word."

Anatoli Pobedinsky: "Lantsman earns about 250 to 270 roubles a month. This is not the maximum for a worker of his skill, because many piece-rate workers make much more. But Lantsman does not want to be a piece-rate worker, he wants to have time for a voluntary work for society. Besides that, as a creative worker he likes to do unusual jobs which require imagination and thought."

Yefim Lantsman is of medium height, slim and grey-haired, a quiet man who talks slowly. Very soon he and I found a common language. Yefim's parents came to Birobijan from the Ukraine in the early 1930s and settled in the village of Amurzet on the bank of the mighty Amur. His father was a stove-maker and his mother worked at a livestock farm and was a contributor to the All-Union Agricultural Exhibition in Moscow in 1939, where Soviet President Mikhail Kalinin decorated her with a silver medal.

Yefim wanted to be an agronomist and was enrolled in an agricultural secondary school. But he began to wonder whether he had made the right choice when he went on an excursion to the factory and saw the huge shops, and the wonderful skill of a turner making intricate parts from pieces of metal. A month later he saw that the factory was advertising for apprentice turners. All hesitation disappeared, he collected his documents from the agricultural school and applied for a job at the plant.

Now he has a family of his own. His wife is a nurse and his son is a student at the journalism department

of the Far Eastern University. Everybody in the family are great admirers of literature. Lantsman senior is particularly fond of the Daghestan poet Rasul Gamzatov and the Kirghiz writer Chinghiz Aitmatov.

In 1982 Yefim Lantsman went to Moscow with a delegation from the Jewish Autonomous Region for the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. In Moscow he, as a worker from Birobijan, was invited to visit a computer plant where a reception was given in his honour. Many of the people at the reception, men and women of different nationalities, spoke about themselves. Yefim Lantsman told them about his city and region and about his life. He said: "In our Region a Jew may marry a Jew, a Russian a Jew, or a Jew a Ukrainian. Jews invite Russians and Mordvinians to their homes, our children play the same games and sing the same songs. We have no national privileges or differences. We all live like one family. When some people abroad start shouting about the so-called 'Jewish question' in the Soviet Union my comrades and I regard this as an attempt to sow discord, as malicious provocation on the part of imperialism and Zionism. Jews in the Soviet Union need neither the protection nor the patronage of foreign 'well-wishers'."

VLADIMIR PELLER'S PERSONAL HAPPINESS

Waldheim is one of the villages nearest to Birobijan. Old-timers remember how it was founded 40 years ago by the Jew Mikhail Gefen and the

Russian Kirill Maslennikov and their families. They chose a site ten kilometres from the railway station, in the forest. There was a lot of fertile land and a river with plenty of fish. They built a house for two families which gave the place its name—Waldheim—the house in the forest.

Today it takes fifteen minutes to reach Waldheim from Birobijan by car and thirty minutes by bus.

At the eleventh kilometre the road takes a sharp turn and you see bungalows and four-storey houses—the village of Waldheim, the centre of the "Legacy of Lenin" state farm.

Many people of great merit have come from Waldheim. One of the best known was Vladimir Peller, whom I was lucky to meet on many occasions. He held all the Order of Glory medals, the top soldier's award*, and was also a Hero of Socialist Labour**, member of the Central Auditing Commission of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and delegate to the Third All-Union Congress of Collective Farmers.

Peller is dead now, but each time I visit Waldheim I recall my meetings with him.

Before one of my visits to Waldheim, a meeting had been held at which the collective farm's board and auditing commission reported on their work. Then a new board and auditing commission were elected. The collective farmers once again unanim-

* Established in 1943 to be awarded to privates and non-commissioned officers of the Soviet Army who showed courage in fighting for their country. The Order of Glory has three classes.

** From 1938 an honorary title, the highest degree of merit for people who have attained outstanding achievement in work. It is awarded by the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and includes the Order of Lenin and the "Hammer and Sickle" gold medal.

ously elected Vladimir Peller chairman of the collective farm board.

The photographer and I were lucky to find him in his office, because usually at about six in the morning Peller was behind the wheel of a cross-country car inspecting the various parts of his collective farm, which includes four villages. On that day he was detained in the office. The room was crowded, so Peller nodded to us as old acquaintances, asking us to wait a while.

As usual I recorded the conversations I heard there.

Peller said to an agronomist: "You'd better send a lorry to Birobijan. Yesterday we were given two more wagonloads of fertilizer, so we'd better pick it up."

Then he turned to the chief engineer: "So you want to hire a new technician at the shop. Do you know him well? What can he do?"

"Well, he doesn't smoke or drink, he's a good family man..."

"The collective farm is not a wife. Can he work properly? If you are sure he can, go ahead with the necessary formalities. Don't go just yet, wait a minute: the Selkhoztekhnika trust has agreed to sell us two new tractors. Have a look at them, will you?"

Suddenly Peller addressed a middle-aged man patiently waiting on the edge of a chair near the door: "What work can you do?"

"I am a machine operator with broad experience. I've worked as a team leader."

"And your wife?"

"She is a teacher and could work in the kindergarten."

"Listen, Boris, see how this man works and make suggestions. And think which flat we can give him."

Then he turned to the man: "Come to me if you need ny help. That's all. Good-bye."

Accountant Aron Panich caught a pause in the conversation to go up to the chairman's desk: "I want to ask for a loan from the collective farm to buy a *Zaporozhets* car."

"Write an application."

A young man went up to the desk and said with great emphasis, as if talking at a meeting:

"Our boys and girls need a tennis court. In town every factory has a tennis court. We must provide maximum facilities for our collective farmers' recreation..."

"Stop preaching. What do you suggest?"

"I suggest that the managing board give us a building."

"Which building?"

"We have one vacant."

"No objection."

As I listened to this talk, I recalled something I had read recently: "... This collective farmer has enough to eat and a home, he even has a government decoration. But he is not satisfied. He wants poems to be written about him..."

These lines are not about Peller. They belong to the famous Soviet Jewish writer Isaac Babel who in Paris in 1935 recalled his meeting with a collective farmer.

Farmer Vladimir Peller lived later than that collective farmer. What had he achieved and what did he want? What did he lack? This is what we talked about when we were alone.

He sat with his big hands on the desk, frowning slightly, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth. That

day he was talkative and answered my questions readily.

"House? Of course, I have a good house. Bread? My children do not know what going without bread means."

He also has government decorations, poems have been written about him and his portrait has been on the front page of newspapers.

"What would your father have said if someone had described to him your life some 35-40 years ago?"

"What could he have said? He would have laughed because he would not have believed it."

"What else do you want from life? What else do you need to be happy? Are you satisfied? Is there nothing you want?"

"Hm. That's a difficult question. I'll have to think about it."

While he ponders, puffing at his cigarette, let me tell you what I know about Peller and the farm he managed.

The collective farm "Legacy of Lenin", founded in 1932, now has an annual income of over a million roubles. Many families have cars of their own or motorcycles with sidecars. Almost every family has cows, pigs or sheep.

Jewish families are in the majority here, but next to them work people of other nationalities; people help each other. Here no one asks what your nationality is, but they do ask what kind of person and worker you are.

The farm's lands stretch over scores of kilometres. Every day its chairman drove over it: to the tractor drivers working in the Zhelty Yar gully, to the women working in the hothouses at Waldheim, to the hospital and the schools... His interest in schools was

not idle curiosity. There he sized up the senior formers and talked to some of them about coming to work on the farm or going to a college or machine-operator school with a grant from the collective farm.

Peller was quite a psychologist. People who remembered him said that he knew the merits and weaknesses not only of every collective farmer but also of every member of their families.

... One young and healthy lad was a regular laggard. His team leader complained that nothing he said made any difference. Peller watched him for about a month. One day he drove to see the team not in the customary cross-country vehicle but in a *Volga*, a comfortable passenger car. The lad could not tear his eyes away from the elegant car.

"Do you want to buy a car?" Peller asked.

"Of course I do."

"I'll help you, but on one condition..."

The lad looked apprehensive.

"My condition is that you work better than everyone else..."

He had a wonderful memory and never used notebooks or calendars. If he promised a tractor driver that he would help him get accommodation at a resort, everybody knew he would remember and keep his word.

A herdswoman at one of the dairy farms once complained that not enough feed had been brought the previous day. She did not worry that Peller wrote nothing down and asked no further questions. She knew that he would not forget to inquire into the matter and bring people to account if necessary.

"Peller sees everything in terms of hectares," complained one speaker at a collective farm meeting.

"Sometimes it is difficult to talk to him: he reduces everything to hectares and incomes..."

Peller did not deny that. "Yes," he said, "as I go to bed I think of how a hectare of newly ploughed fallow land can be put to better use, and when I wake up I again think of income per hectare. I have learned from my own and others' experience: if we want to live well and dream realistically we must build life with our own heads, think, and look for ways to obtain more income from each hectare."

A man without higher education, Peller was called an academician of rational farming. His biography would read almost like a novel, with adventures and sudden turns of the plot, and also reflections at life's crossroads. He met different people who judged what he did in different ways. Some called him crazy to his face, others embraced and kissed him. Then there were some who thought that Peller had wronged them and demanded that he be put on trial and expelled from the Party.

"You really are crazy," fellow soldiers told Vladimir Peller in the 1930s when he was demobilized and stayed to work on a collective farm in the Far East instead of going home, to the Ukraine. At the new place he had nothing but his strong hands, while in the Ukraine his father and brother were doing well on a collective farm. But he stayed, and three years later the collective farmers elected him their chairman.

During the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) Peller showed impermissible magnanimity to the enemy when he let a German prisoner go and was sent to a punitive company. His courage and resourcefulness later in fighting the Nazis won him the Order of

Glory of all three classes and the rank of junior lieutenant. He was wounded nine times.

Once an American journalist asked Peller what his attitude to the nationalities question was. Peller lit a cigarette and said: "I'll answer your question with a question. But first I'll mention two facts. When I was wounded in a raid on the Nazi rear during the war a Russian soldier risked his life dragging me over the frontline, then he donated his blood for me. When we were building a Jewish national collective farm we needed good seeds. Russian collective farmers shared with us the last seed they had. So what do you think my attitude to the national question is?"

Eva Brück, a journalist from the German Democratic Republic, went to Waldheim especially to interview Vladimir Peller.

As we together travelled by train from Moscow, Eva was anxious about meeting Peller. She had been told that he was a straightforward and uncompromising person. If he liked you he would do everything for you, if not, you wouldn't be able to draw a dozen words out of him.

Eva Brück wanted to have a frank interview. She was surprised that a modest collective farm chairman should bear the title of Hero of Socialist Labour, that he was a member of the Auditing Commission of the Soviet Communist Party.

Later I received two letters from Berlin. Eva Brück wrote: "I am completing the second part of my book, which is a story about Siberia, Birobijan, Waldheim, my friend Vladimir Peller and other fine people whom I had the good luck to meet...

"Writing about such wonderful people and their achievements in your country is no easy matter. Simple description is easy, of course, but I want to

write with sincerity and conviction, so that even the most hardened sceptic will both believe and feel that there, in the Far East of the Soviet Union, miracles are being worked, that these people should be more than just respected, they should be loved because they represent mankind's future."

But to return to our talk with Peller. What did he want?

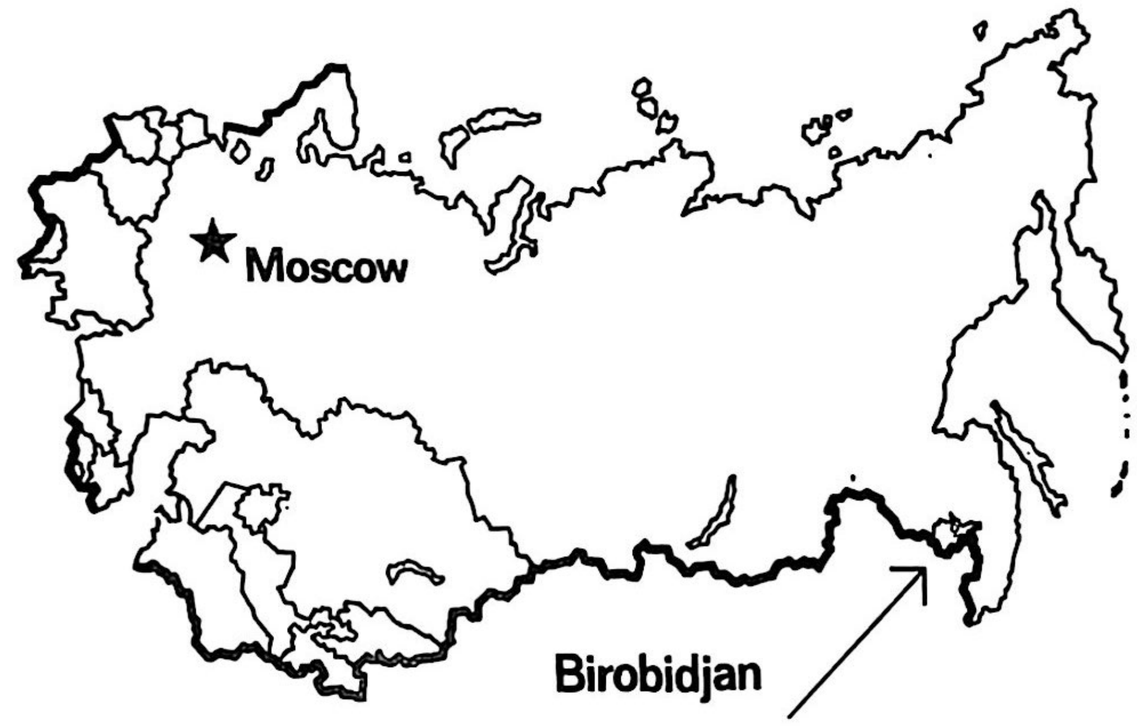
"I want our collective farm to have an annual income of four million roubles. What do we have now? Our income over the last ten months was 1,700,000 roubles, of which 241,000 is net profit, although it was not a good year. How can we make four million? In the first place we are going to build a poultry farm of our own in the new five-year period. The advantage is obvious: the city is close, so eggs will sell well. And we have all the feed we need. We'll grow more potatoes, which we shall be able to sell in the city before others can bring their potatoes. We are expanding our hothouses, because early vegetables are always profitable.

"We also plan to build a 40-flat block for young couples, two 30-flat blocks and a complex catering for children."

"Wait a minute! All this is for the collective farm. What about yourself, your personal happiness?"

"How can you separate the two? It's my collective farm, it belongs to my children and my friends, that is to me. I don't need anything else."

Once again I went to Waldheim, but I wouldn't see Peller any more. I had before me *Birobijaner Shtern* which said: "The street where the Peller's house stands in the village of Waldheim was unusually crowded at noon yesterday with collective farmers, workers of the city enterprises and institutions, and



schoolchildren, as well as the secretaries of the party district committee, deputies to the district and village Soviets of People's Deputies.

"The secretary of the collective farm Party committee opened the meeting, and announced that the memorial plaque on the Pellers' house would be unveiled by the collective farm chairman Felix Glikshtein; the chairman of the village Soviet Yefim Koisman, a veteran of the Great Patriotic War; the former director of the Waldheim secondary school Isaac Prishkolnik, a merited school teacher of the Russian Federation; a collective farm member, Riva Vishchinikina; and Seryozha Gaiduk, Vladimir Peller's grandson.

"The red cover slid from the marble plaque to reveal the inscription: 'Peller Street, named in 1979 in honour of our fellow-villager, former chairman of the 'Legacy of Lenin' collective farm, Hero of Socialist Labour, bearer of the Order of Glory of three classes Vladimir Peller (1913-1978).'

"After the meeting those who attended planted trees on both sides of the street. The young trees will raise their green crowns in spring and will grow from year to year, putting down their roots into the soil on which the famed grain grower and soldier lived and toiled."

ORDINARY PEOPLE'S LIVES

Several years later I was back at the managing board of the "Legacy of Lenin" collective farm.

In the chairman's office I saw Felix Glikshtein, a man in his fifties. We had just begun talking when Boris Rak, deputy chairman and son of one of the

village's founders, Ehil Rak, entered the room. Here is what they told me.

Today the collective farm has 3,700 hectares under crops, 120 powerful tractors, 20 self-propelled caterpillar combine harvesters for grain crops, maize and potatoes, 70 lorries and many more farm machines. The cattle herd numbers nearly 3,000. All the dairy farms are fully mechanized. In 1982 the collective farm sold nearly 10,000 tons of vegetables, potatoes, soya beans, meat, milk and over a million eggs. The total receipts from the sales came to 4,122,000 roubles. The average wages of the herdswomen are 180-200 roubles a month and of farm machine operators 155-200 roubles.

The collective farm uses its high income and bank loans to finance large-scale construction. In the last ten years they have built five mechanized cow sheds, a new House of Culture with a gymnasium and a stadium. The collective farm now has three nurseries, three cultural centres and a library, a clinic, a hospital and a secondary school.

Two hundred and twenty new houses have gone up in Waldheim and other villages of the region. Almost every family has moved into a new home.

The collective farm's total property is now worth 12 million roubles.

I visited a dairy farm, hothouses and mechanical shops and talked to Rahil Freidkina, a merited pensioner who for many years worked as the collective farm's chief zootechnician.

Boris Rak told me the story of their big family. His father Ehil Rak came from the Ukraine to the Far East among the first settlers. He built houses and ploughed the land. People elected him the first chair-

man of the local collective farm, and he raised seven children.

Boris Rak listed them for me: "My elder brother Alexander graduated from a college and now works in the city of Orel as the chief of a leading design office for the light industry. David graduated from a civil engineering college and is a foreman on the farm. Nikolai is an electrician, Naum, a woodworker, and my youngest brother, Yefim, has recently been made the manager of a new state farm in our region. My sister Batya is an accountant and Roza is a cook. Waldheim is our native home. Father's and mother's brothers who live in Moscow and Leningrad visit us here and we go to see them. I can say quite honestly that we are better off than all of our relatives. We have everything: fine spacious houses, modern furniture, three of us have bought cars; I could buy one if I wanted to. Our children study and we are happy.

"We have found happiness on this land. If our father saw us he would be pleased.

"Our family is one of many. Call at any house and you will see comfort and prosperity."

I talked to Samuil Faiman, a team leader at the dairy farm, Ivan Kurgansky, a farm machine operator, and Yaroslav Somik. I saw these people at work and at home and I heard them speak of peace and happiness and of their wish to live and work for the good of the entire Soviet people. They strongly condemned Israel's provocations in the Middle East and branded as provocative the statements by Israel's leaders about "protecting Soviet Jews" and their calls for people to go to Israel.

"Our native land is the great Soviet Union, the land where we are happy," said Feiga Faiman. My

conversation with that woman and the story of her life deserve special attention.

A collective farmers' meeting was being held in Waldheim. The speakers discussed the farm's achievements and problems. When the meeting's chairman gave the floor to Feiga Faiman the audience applauded. A dark-haired woman of medium height walked to the rostrum. She wore the Order of Lenin and the Badge of Honour and also golden and silver medals of the USSR Exhibition of Economic Achievements. She began with these words: "Do you remember, fellow countrymen, what a bad spring we had? There were late frosts followed by a drought. But we gathered a fine harvest of potatoes, cucumbers and cabbages. The lorries can hardly cope with all the vegetables we have grown. We managed this because the collective farm purchased enough fertilizer and excellent machinery and equipment which have made our work much easier, because we had good agronomists to help us and also because when the work was very difficult Birobijan city workers and students came to help us. This support, this comradely help, is certainly one of the reasons for our success.

"We live in friendship, dear fellow countrymen. On our collective farm work people of many nationalities: Russians, Ukrainians and Mordvinians... We all have the same rights and the same aims. When I think of this I recall the letters which I received from the Rojsen family in Israel, whom I did not know until they wrote to me, and I think of their sorrow. We must not forget the sad experience of the Rojsen family..."

What letters were those? What was the sad experience of the Rojsen family? Why did the Rojsen

family in Israel choose to write to collective farmer Feiga Faiman from the village of Waldheim in the Soviet Far East?

We talked to Feiga in her large house surrounded by young plum and cherry trees, went with her to the historical museum of the "Legacy of Lenin" collective farm and she told me the story of her life.

Feiga Faiman's parents came to the Far East in 1931 from the Ukrainian village of Romanovka near the town of Berdichev. Theirs was a big family: father, mother and five children. Her father had long dreamed of becoming a gardener, so when he arrived here he asked for a plot of land and some saplings to start an orchard. His request was granted by the local authorities, he planted a garden and then became the leader of a gardeners' team. Later the collective farm, on his suggestion, built its first hothouses to grow vegetable seedlings and then he became the leader of a vegetable growing team.

His wife was busy all her life keeping house and bringing up the children. All of them finished secondary school and are now working on the collective farm. At school Feiga was an enthusiastic member of a young nature lovers' circle, and asked her father to let her grow seedlings and plant vegetables. After school she began to work in her father's team and has since been working as vegetable grower.

But Feiga did not confine herself to her work and family life. She also attended an amateur drama group and sang in a choir. She was elected a deputy to the village Soviet of People's Deputies. She joined the Communist Party and two years later her team's Communists elected her their party organizer and then a member of the bureau of the district Party

committee. For more than 15 years Feiga has been a member of the Soviet Women's Committee.

She has a fine family: her husband, four children, and grandchildren. She likes to prepare Jewish dishes, such as a chicken broth with dumplings made of ground matzoh, gefilte fish and stewed meat with pies. She makes jams and jellies from the plums, cherries, currants and raspberries gathered in her own garden.

"Once when I was resting at home I heard a broadcast about Zionists who allege that Jews in the Soviet Union are oppressed and that they should be protected. I was very angry and wrote a letter to the *Soviet Woman* magazine saying what I and my children and my fellow countrymen thought and felt about that. Here is that article."

Feiga showed me a dog-eared magazine and her article in it.

"I attend the meetings of our collective farm board where Jews, Russians, Ukrainians and people of other nationalities sit together. They look different and have different characters, but they have no contradictions—political, social or moral—and they easily find a common language, the language of brotherhood.

"Do you want them to quarrel, to sow national discord? That is a futile task, futile and thankless!"

"After publication of the article I began to get letters," Feiga Faiman continues. "Never before had I received so many letters, from all parts of the Soviet Union and from abroad. Their authors agreed with me. One day I got this letter from Israel.

"Dear Feiga Faiman,

"Do not be surprised by a letter from an un-

known person. Here in Israel I ran across a copy of Soviet Woman *and read your open letter. It is indeed a just letter, which is confirmed by life.*

"I would like briefly to recount what happened to me. My name is Bejla Rojsen and I was born in 1923 in the town of Pervomayskoye in Odessa Region. My family consists of my husband and three children, the eldest of whom lives in the town of Bendery in Moldavia. My husband Rachmil Rojsen lost his parents, a brother and sisters, during the last world war. In 1956 he learned that they lived in Israel. His family began sending us invitations. Without knowing the true facts about that 'paradise' and for the sake of my husband, I left my son, my old mother and sisters behind and set out for Israel with two daughters and my husband. That was on March 8, 1970. We could not even guess what hardships awaited us.

"As soon as we arrived there we felt sad and injured. The fact is that we were liked for only a couple of days. A wise adage says that for the truth one gets beaten, as was our case. They wanted us to tell lies about the Soviet Union but how could we paint what was white black?

"... For four months we were without work. My husband was offered unskilled work which he rejected because of the low pay. Now that we have stated that we want to go back home we cannot find any work at all. We have nothing to live on. My children cannot continue their musical studies because of the cost. And they had always had excellent marks both in general and music schools...

"It is beyond one's comprehension," Bejla

> Rojsen continued, *"on what grounds the rulers of Israel invite Soviet people. Will they find work and accommodation here? Will their children get a proper education and upbringing? I can answer on the strength of my own experience: no, there is nothing for Soviet Jews here! Those who come bemoan their fate."*

Feiga Faiman put the letter on the table, was silent for a while, then said: "This is not the first time that people who believed hostile propaganda bemoan the day and hour when they let themselves be persuaded into leaving their real homeland, where they are guaranteed all human and social rights. The sad story of the Rojsen family is fresh proof that the brazen Zionist slanderers cannot be trusted. Our only and happy homeland is the Soviet Union! We have built for ourselves and our children towns and villages, a happy life, with our own hands, with the hands of our grandfathers and fathers, in a fraternal alliance with people of other nationalities. This land is dear to us, we shall make it more beautiful with our work, and our children will defend it!"

UNCLE MISHA, THE KING OF BIROBIJAN'S HAIRDRESSERS

There was a queue at the hairdresser's. When I asked who was last, a middle-aged man replied: "If you mean who is last for Uncle Misha, I am. If not, go ahead, there's no queue for the other barbers."

Many people in Birobijan like to have their hair done only by Mikhail Gomberg. His colleagues accept this as something natural. One of them commented: "Uncle Misha is the king of hairdressers. I myself have my hair cut by him. And you should see what hairstyles he invents for the fair sex!"

Mikhail Gomberg won the second prize at a national hairdressers' contest held in Moscow. The TV reporter covering the contest said: "He is not just a first-class hairdresser, he's an artist!"

Gomberg calls himself a native of Birobijan despite the fact that he was born in the village of Lysenka near the Ukrainian capital Kiev. On finishing secondary school he decided to see for himself the big cities which he knew from textbooks. He went to Stalingrad on the Volga, found a good job and accommodation and lived there very contentedly.

One day he received a letter from his parents who wrote: "Dear son, you have probably heard that a Jewish national autonomy is being established in the Far East. Our neighbours and friends are going there. The state grants the settlers a loan and a transfer allowance... After a lot of thought we have decided to go too. What do you want to do?" That same day Mikhail sent his parents a telegram: "I'm going with you."

On June 20, 1932, another settlers' train arrived at Tikhonkaya Station, now the city of Birobijan. All the adult members of the Gomberg family began to work in the producer cooperative "The Wheel of the Revolution" that made cart wheels and axles, badly needed by settlers beginning to develop new lands.

Mikhail, for his part, decided to remain a hairdresser and has not changed his profession for more than 50 years. To be exact there was a break of almost five years when Mikhail Gomberg, like everybody else, took up arms to defend his Soviet home-

land from the Nazis. He came back to Birobijan in 1945 wearing two medals.

He has not worked as a bricklayer, carpenter or foreman on a construction site. But when we walked along Sholom Aleichem Street he proudly pointed to an imposing high-rise building and said: "I remember the foundations of the first house being laid here. And where *Rodina* (Homeland) cinema is now there was a forest where we went mushrooming. I have seen each house built. These people, my fellow countrymen, are dear to me, as is everything linked with this town."

"But dearest of all," he continued, "is my big and wonderful family. I may sound immodest but I am proud of my wife, my sons and daughters, grandsons and nieces."

His wife, one of the first graduates of the Birobijan Medical School, worked as a nurse at the regional hospital and is now on pension. One of Uncle Misha's daughters is a cutter at the hose and knitted goods factory. Her portrait is on the city's Board of Honour. She is an active voluntary worker and a deputy to the town's Soviet of People's Deputies. His second daughter is a nurse. The third lives in the Caucasus with her husband, a graduate of two colleges and head of a big construction organization. One of his sons went against his father's will—Mikhail wanted him to study at college for an engineering profession—and became an apprentice turner at the Dalselmash plant where he has since attained a very high grading as a machine-tool operator. The management has several times sent him to skill-improvement courses, he has graduated from an evening secondary mechanical school and has now been made senior foreman. He is a member of the

Communist Party. His wife, also a Communist, is an engineer who trains young workers.

It is a matter of great honour in Mikhail Gomberg's family to be a Communist and an active voluntary worker. For 25 years the Communists of the town complex of everyday services have elected Mikhail Gomberg a member of their Party bureau.

When I phoned Gomberg to make another appointment I could hear many gay voices over the receiver.

"Are you celebrating something?" I asked.

"We always celebrate when relatives and friends call," replied Uncle Misha, "but, to be honest, there is never a day when nobody calls."

When Mikhail Gomberg and his wife went for a holiday to their relatives in the town of Cherkessk in the Caucasus he met there an official from the local regional Soviet of People's Deputies. When the latter learned that his new acquaintance was a good hairdresser he joyfully offered: "Why don't you stay here for good? We'll give you a good flat!"

"You know what I replied to that good man? I did not leave Birobijan when my father and I and our friends and neighbours built houses, factories and cultural centres with our own hands. That was no easy time. And now that a fine city has been built, my native town where my friends and relatives live, where every passer-by says: 'Hello, Uncle Misha!'—how can I leave this town?

"I will soon be 80. I am a pensioner. My wife and I have enough money. Our home has everything we need. But I go to work—for four hours a day—no more. Why do I go to work? Because I want to be among people, my fellow-citizens, I want to be a worker like everyone else, not a mere onlooker."

THE YOUNGEST SON IN THE BLEKHMAN FAMILY

When the famous magician Wolf Messing was on tour in Birobijan, his first concert began unusually. The woman announcer walked on to the floodlit stage and addressed the audience: "Wolf Messing is in a good mood. He says he has travelled all over the world but has never tasted a dinner as excellent as in your city. He asked me to thank the chef!"

The huge hall broke into applause. Hundreds of faces turned towards a baldish middle-aged man sitting with his family, his head bowed in embarassment. Later he said: "I was at a loss. I had come to the theatre as a member of the audience, but the people applauded me and my wife whispered: 'You should be proud, Yakov! You are a famous person!' But I am only a cook."

Yakov Blekhman's childhood was spent in a poor neighbourhood of the port of Odessa on the Black Sea. His father was, in the opinion of his children and his neighbours, a first-rate confectioner, but he didn't have the money to open a shop of his own, however small. He often dreamed out loud of how a great fortune might befall their family in the shape of a wad of banknotes found in the street, with which he would buy the equipment for his pastry shop. Or good fortune might come in the shape of a very rich man who would stray by mistake into their poor quarter and would see how good his pastry was; that would be a good advertisement, and then Blekhman would not need to look for buyers but rich buyers would come driving around their quarter to look for him!

Nobody donated them a wad of banknotes, nor did

a revelling rich man come their way. His father died, leaving his daughter and two sons only hopes and dreams. His mother's death was another cruel blow.

Things beyond young Yakov's grasp were happening then: there was shooting in the city and power changed hands between the Whites and the Reds.

One day men in leather coats and with stars on their caps came to their house. Yakov's brother decided they must be Reds. "How are you, folks," one of them said smiling. "Let's get acquainted," he addressed the eldest brother. "We're from the Cheka."*

"Why have you come?"

"Your neighbours told us you're living alone, without parents, and starving. We'll take you to a children's home, where you will be fed, clothed and taught a useful occupation."

The eldest brother wanted to run away, because he was afraid they would make him do hard work. But Yakov and his sister persuaded him to remain, arguing that if things turned out badly they would run away together.

They did not, however, have to run away. At the children's home they were given clothes and fed. No one beat them, no one made them do hard work. The only thing required of them was that they should study. And that was something their father had always talked about, he dreamed of teaching his children to read and write. Teachers were the most important people at the children's home.

When the children grew up, each of them was asked what he or she wanted to be. Yakov's sister

* The Extraordinary Commission for Fighting Sabotage, Speculation and Counterrevolution—*Ed.*

promptly said that she wanted to be a teacher. To Yakov's great surprise she was sent to study at a college. What was more, she was given a place at a hostel and a grant.

Yakov himself went to a secondary technical school to train for work in the food industry. When he graduated from the school, Yakov was made a chef at a restaurant.

In 1934, when young people were setting out for new places to build new towns Yakov Blekhman decided that a chef's trade was no longer for him, that a builder's work was much more romantic. So he went to the Odessa regional committee of the Young Communist League (the Komsomol) and asked to be sent to the Far East where his peers were founding a new town in the taiga. Yakov's request was granted. He was given a Komsomol ticket and with a large group of young men and women—Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Kazakhs and others—he went to where Komsomolsk-on-the-Amur was being built.

But he did not work there for long, because a representative of the Jewish settlers visited the construction site where he was working and persuaded him to move to Tikhonkaya Station where the future Birobijan was going up. Yakov agreed, because Birobijan was then also among the top priority projects. When Yakov arrived at his destination and asked for a builder's job he was told: "Your job is to feed people, and that is no less important for society than laying bricks."

Yakov stayed in Birobijan. The town was growing before his eyes, and he had a part in it. Small producer cooperatives grew into factories. Next to them the foundations of bigger industrial enterprises were laid. Here Yakov married, here his children

were born. From here he went to the front and here he returned after victory. He was present at the celebrations when the Jewish Autonomous Region was awarded the orders of Lenin and of Peoples' Friendship. He had put down roots in this Far Eastern land, now his own.

People often shake Yakov Blekhman's hand and ask: "How do you manage to cook so well?"

How do you answer a question like that? He wants people to be happy, to leave his restaurant in a good mood. Many years ago he decided that people should be able to taste real Jewish dishes in the Birobijan restaurant. He went to see Jewish housewives, tasted their dishes and wrote down recipes. That is how the restaurant's bill of fare acquired the celebrated sweet-and-sour meat, *tsimes,* stuffed pike and stewed meat with a little pie.

An old woman gave him the recipe of a French dish—consommé with vol-au-vents—and it was added to the menu. Then came the famous German strudel, Russian *okroshka* (a cold soup, usually of *kvass*, with finely chopped vegetables, hard-boiled eggs and meat) and jellied meat, schnitzel à l'africaine, eggs à la Cubaine, and Bulgarian fried eggs with sweet pepper.

A good craftsman is one who can make a perfect copy. The true craftsman is one who creates his own masterpieces, like Blekhman. The first prize at a Far Eastern exhibition of specialty dishes held in Khabarovsk was won by *kvass* taiga style, the *Amur* soft drink and the Jewish sweet pastry *zemelakh*, all made to Yakov Blekhman's recipes.

One evening there was a knock at Blekhman's door. He opened it and saw a militiaman standing there.

"Have you got a sister called Clara?"

"I once had a sister called Clara. What about her?"

"I want to know why you don't write to her, why the militia should have to go round reminding worthy people that they have a sister. She wrote to the militia asking us to help her find her own brother. Why could the brother not find the sister? Do you want to know her address?"

"Of course I do. Do come in, please."

That came as a complete surprise. Blekhman had lost his sister Clara and elder brother during the war and believed them to be dead. But Clara proved to be alive and well, living with her family in Leningrad.

Blekhman took a holiday and went to Leningrad. He went to Clara's flat and met her and his elder brother, a retired colonel.

Theirs was a long and joyous meeting. They had a lot to tell each other.

Yakov Blekhman's work has been highly praised: in 1958 he was awarded the title of Master Cook and given the badge "To an Excellent Worker in Soviet Trade". Seven years later the town awarded him the honorary title Master Golden Hands. On festive occasions his wife pins on his coat the Badge of Honour order.

Although retired now, Yakov Blekhman continues to pass on his rich experience to the young.

VERA GLEIZER

As this grey-haired woman walks about town many passers-by say hello and wish her good health.

Vera Gleizer is respected by the people of

Birobijan for her work as a teacher, for her uprightness, for her fine but difficult life.

Her parents came to what is now the Jewish Autonomous Region in 1932. They had fourteen children. Her father was invited to settle in the village of Nadezhdinskoye, where Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians and people of other nationalities lived. The local collective farmers welcomed the new family, gave them a house and helped them in every way. Her father began to work as the manager of a dairy farm.

Vera's childhood was a hard one. Her father died when she was very young. A little later Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, her brothers went to the front while she studied and after school hours she, like most other children, worked at the collective farm.

Many people in the village knew that Vera was a good worker and an active and principled Komsomol member. They also knew that she wanted to become a teacher.

Thus it came about that in those times, when every pair of hands counted, the collective farm chairman said to her: "Go to Birobijan, take the entrance exams to the teachers' college, study, and we'll help you."

She was accepted at the college and also began to work as a typist at the YCL regional committee. Her marks at the college were invariably excellent. Even before she graduated the director of one of the town's schools invited her to give lessons.

Vera Gleizer believes that to teach others one has always to study oneself. First she took a correspondence course at the Khabarovsk Junior Teacher Training College, then she signed up for a correspon-

dence course at the Teachers' Institute, which she completed with excellent marks. She taught mathematics at a secondary school, then was made director of studies, then inspector at the town education department and, three years later, the head of that department.

She married early, at 17. Her married happiness was brief: the war began and Vera's husband was called up and sent to an air-force school. He sent her letters almost every day and she, every day without fail. At the end of the war, in 1945, she was informed that her husband, a pilot on a long-range bomber, had not returned to base. She wept for three weeks, then, out of the blue, received a letter from her husband. His plane had been shot down but he had baled out and made it to the Soviet side.

She was so overjoyed that she did not believe the second notice of death which she got a month later, telling her that her husband's plane had been shot down. She would not believe that he was dead and waited one year, two years, five years. She still clings to a shadow of hope, although she knows there can be no hope any longer.

She thinks of other people's children as her own. She gives them all her love, tenderness and care.

When a boarding school for orphans was about to be opened in Birobijan Vera Gleizer asked the town Party committee to release her from her post of education department head and permit her to work as a teacher at the boarding school. She was appointed the school's headmistress.

For many years Vera worked at that school. Today many of her former pupils—engineers, workers, pilots, teachers and agronomists—write to her: "We think of you as our mother..." Her school was

famous throughout the Jewish Autonomous Region. Its pupils and teachers established a fine museum with a wealth of material about Birobijan's history, the friendship of peoples in the Soviet Union and prominent Birobijaners. Every year large groups of schoolchildren went on tours of the Soviet Union and of its Far Eastern areas.

The Soviet government awarded Vera Gleizer the honorary title of Merited School Teacher of the Russian Federation. She has been elected to the city Soviet where she heads the standing commission on public education. Birobijan's Communists elected her member of the city Party committee.

When she retired Vera asked to be given voluntary work to do and she became a lecturer at the city's *Znaniye* (Knowledge) society and chairman of the city teachers' society.

"I am convinced that every conscientious person must work tirelessly for the good of people," Vera Gleizer says. "I also believe that we must do everything we can to preserve peace on earth. I have lived through war, and I don't want young people to live through it."

A FESTIVAL IN THE HOUSE OF CULTURE

Colourful bills posted all over the city invited everybody to attend the Birobijan festival of amateur drama, dancing and singing at the city House of Culture.

The festival began on a Saturday morning. The huge hall was full. The honour of opening the festival went to the amateur ensemble from the Dalselmash

plant which had won the first place at the previous amateur contest.

More than 1,000 people performed in the festival this time. Galina Adamova, a worker at the power transformer plant, and her son Volodya, a schoolboy, sang in Yiddish (although they are Russian) the popular song "Aliosha" about one of the Soviet soldiers who liberated Bulgaria from the Nazis and was killed in action.

Dancing groups performed Russian and Jewish folk dances and the band from the garments factory and the builders' brass band played with spirit and skill.

At the same time the actors of the Birobijan Jewish Folk Theatre rehearsed each evening on the first floor of the House of Culture.

The folk theatre, which performs in Yiddish and is directed by Berta Shilman, is over 20 years old. Its repertoire includes *Masltov* (Congratulations), *200,000* (A Big Win) and *A Doktor*, plays by the classic Jewish writer Sholom Aleichem, *Di Kischufmacherin* (The Sorceress), a play by Abraham Goldfaden, and *Gerschele Ostropoljer* (Gerschele from Ostropolye), a comedy based on folklore written by Mojscha Gerschenson, a Soviet Jewish playwright. The life of the working people of Birobijan, their work, concerns and interests are the subject of the plays *Funem himl falt gornit arop* (Miracles Don't Happen) and *Dreiunddreisik Gibojrim* (Three and Thirty Warriors) written by the Jewish writer Boris Miller, a veteran Birobijaner and author of several books about his native land.

The theatre also gives big concerts and literary recitals.

"I'm very happy to live in my beloved Birobijan

and stage plays in my native language," said Berta Shilman.

"The repertoire of the Birobijan Folk Theatre includes nearly thirty plays, classics and works by contemporary Soviet authors. The theatre has staged, for example, Anouilh's *Antigone,* and *Engineer*, a drama by the Soviet writer Kaplinskaya."

Everywhere in the Jewish Autonomous Region people of all nationalities have every opportunity to improve their artistic talents. There are nine music schools for children in the Region's towns and villages, more than a hundred recreation centres and Houses of Culture and many libraries.

Birobijan's violin ensemble, which has played at the Kremlin Palace of Congresses in Moscow and won a prize at the first all-Russia festival of amateur art, is very popular. The Melodia recording company in Moscow has made a disc of the ensemble's performance.

The show group *Frejlechs* (Joy) has toured Central Russia, Central Asia, the Baltic republics, northern areas of the country and the Caucasus. In 1983 it performed in Moscow.

The Jewish professional chamber music theatre was opened in Birobijan on the initiative of the CPSU Regional Committee, the regional Soviet of People's Deputies and the public. It staged for the first time the opera mysteria *A schvarz zajml far a vajs ferdl* (A Black Bridle for a White Mare). It was the world's first opera in Yiddish, adopted from the play in verse by Ilya Reznik and staged by the director and choreographer Yuri Sherling and ballet mistress Eleonora Vlasova, People's Artiste of the

Russian Federation, and designed by Ilya Glazunov, People's Artist of the USSR.

The theatre's troupe includes actors, musicians and dancers from Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Yerevan and other Soviet cities who have been selected after a talent contest.

"The establishment of the Jewish chamber music theatre was an important event in the cultural life not only of the Jewish Autonomous Region but of the whole Soviet people," was the comment of Alexander Fliarkovsky, secretary of the Soviet Composers' Union.

The Soviet government has given the new company everything they need for fruitful work, sparing no expense, and the company has been vigorously supported by party and government organizations in Moscow, Khabarovsk, and Birobijan.

SATURDAY AT BIROBIJAN SYNAGOGUE

The synagogue in Birobijan is a five-minute walk from the city centre, in Chapayev Street. A group of elderly people were talking in the courtyard when I approached and joined them.

"Nobody in Birobijan prevents practising Jews from hearing the Talmud read or interferes with them; they can gather for prayer every day if they wish," said Mark Sluch, secretary of the religious community. "I remember Maya Kozlova, a Soviet government representative, coming to us asking if

there was anything we needed. Later the city Soviet helped us repair the synagogue."

"I'm an old man," Mark Sluch continued. "I'm 75 and I have seen a great deal. I've worked as an accountant and played in the Jewish folk theatre. I have never concealed the fact that I was religious. In fact, when a religious holiday fell on a weekday, I used to ask for leave and was granted it, though I know very well that nobody is obliged to do this."

"I'm respected in the town, and I respect the people with whom I have lived nearly all my life," said cantor Abram Zingar. "I am surprised when I read about the alleged 'persecution of Jews in the Soviet Union'. Rubbish is all I have to say to that. All people have the same rights in the Soviet Union, and here in Birobijan as everywhere else I have been we live together like friends and work together with Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Georgians. We have no racial or any other grudges against one another. As members of the Birobijan religious community we have written a letter to the US President, that deluded man, whose idea of our life and our relationships is completely wrong."

Abram Zingar told me about himself. He came to Birobijan in 1933 and worked as a railwayman. In 1942, during the war against the Nazis, he was called up, was wounded twice and in 1946 returned to Birobijan and worked as before. When he was 60 he retired and became a cantor.

Next I talked to Genakh Alchiker. He agreed with what his friends had said.

A baker, he worked for many years at the collective farm in Waldheim, then moved to Birobijan. He has a big family: three children, eleven grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. One of his sons

graduated from a teachers training college and now teaches history at a secondary school and his daughter is the manager of a big shop.

FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE

In the course of his tour of the Soviet Far East Doctor Franz Köhler, a correspondent from the *Horizont* magazine in the German Democratic Republic visited the Jewish Autonomous Republic. Dr. Köhler, a widely travelled journalist, had on many occasions stated that in his view the same kind of people lived in Birobijan as in Kiev, Tbilisi or Odessa. But he wanted to know how, by whom and in what conditions the Jewish Autonomous Region was founded. Therefore in his series of articles published in *Horizont* under the title "The Land Between the Bira and the Bijan" he concentrated on the historical, geographical and social aspects of the region's life.

At times the veteran journalist was unable to conceal his surprise.

"Exactly 8,358 kilometres from Moscow," he writes, "the train pulled up at the modern building of Birobijan Station. It used to be Tikhonkaya Station on the Trans-Siberian Railway, where there were a few fishermen's, hunters' and, of course, railwaymen's cottages.

"Today every teenager in the Soviet Union knows of this place, because Birobijan is the capital city of the Jewish Autonomous Region," Franz Köhler began his story. "In tsarist Russia Jews were discriminated against... The October Revolution brought complete equality to Jews as to all other

nationalities. The Jewish Pale was abolished and Jews were given access to schools, colleges and factories. They had previously been unable to farm, but now they were given land.

"They came here from all parts of the Soviet Union in order to begin a new life under Soviet government. People of other nationalities—Russians and Ukrainians—came with them. They cleared taiga forest and built houses.

"In the city's central square I saw a board showing Birobijan's economic growth in figures.

"The Dalselmash combine harvester plant is the city's pride. Its management encourages the workers to improve their skills and makes everything it can to build more houses for workers, to provide places at nurseries for more of the children of its workers and engineers and to promote cooperation with related factories.

" 'Do many Jews work at your plant?' I asked the deputy manager. 'I can tell you how many men and women we have, how many Communists and non-party workers, how many excellent workers we have and how many laggards, but I cannot tell you how many people of different nationalities we have. When we hire a person we look first of all at what he can do and the decisive factor is a person's conscientiousness, not nationality.'

"This is what I heard from Yakov Kul, a worker at the plant:

" 'When I hear about the slander campaign conducted by the Zionist circles in Israel and the United States about the alleged anti-Semitism in our country, I want to shout at them: Listen to me. I am a Jew. You and I know perfectly well who helped hundreds of thousands of Jews to escape death, who

saved them from the Nazi Wehrmacht. None of us then asked our saviours who they were—Russians, Ukrainians or Kazakhs. Nor today do we ask our sons: is your girl-friend a Russian or a Tatar? We have one homeland, the Soviet Union.'

"Jewish citizens defended their homeland during the Second World War. There is a monument to those who fell during the war, in the square in front of the Dalselmash. The memorial plaque bears the names of Russians, Ukrainians, Jews and people of other nationalities. A Nazi bullet did not ask one's origin or nationality. Iosif Bumagin, a Jew, repeated the exploit of Alexander Matrosov when he threw himself at the embrasure of a German pillbox in order to enable his comrades to advance and was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

"In no other country are the works of Jewish writers and poets published in such large editions as in the Soviet Union. Many newspapers and magazines printed in Russian, Yiddish, Ukrainian and other languages of the Soviet peoples acquaint their readers with the life and works of the Jewish writer Sholom Aleichem. Another six-volume edition of his works has been published recently.

"Many of the Jews whom we met in Birobijan had lived through the Second World War. Neither they nor their friends and relatives would even contemplate leaving the Soviet Union and travelling heaven knows where in order to become the involuntary accomplices of the aggressive imperialist policy. A new generation of young Jews has grown up in Soviet times. They have been raised in the excellent conditions furnished by the socialist way of life. Young Jews have themselves contributed to building

this social system, they have built their own life.

"Why should these people leave their own country?"

So thinks Dr. Franz Köhler, a journalist from the German Democratic Republic.

Albert Axelbank is a US journalist who, to put it mildly, does not take a sympathetic view of communism. During his trip to Birobijan he sought a second meaning in everything, often asked for his itinerary to be changed and put questions which were far from friendly. He published impressions of his trip in the *San Francisco Chronicle* where he wrote: "Birobijan—it gets the name from two rivers in the area, the Bira and the Bijan—is permeated with controversy and I wished to look, as far as is allowed, into the nature of this controversy.

"The name Birobijan, by the way, is often used to denote the entire Jewish Autonomous Region. The region, though small, is bigger than Belgium, or Massachusetts, or Israel. ...

"On the way to the Hotel Vostok, a modern five-storey affair, I got a glimpse of this city...

"I saw factories, institutes, schools. I observed many tree-lined streets, new apartment blocks, a steady flow of automobiles (mostly Russian-made *Volgas* and Fiat-type *Zhigulis*), and rather well-dressed people. ...

"Outside the capital city are a number of collective farms that were founded by Jewish pioneers. At the 'Legacy of Lenin' collective farm, I spoke to Jewish milkmaids and vegetable growers. They appeared content, secure, energetic. ...

"The manager of the giant Dalselmash factory which makes combine harvesters, many of them for

export, is a Jew. So is the manager of the local textile mill whose socks and knitted wear are popular throughout the Soviet Far East. Many city and regional officials, engineers, architects, teachers and merited workers (those who received government decorations) are Jews.

"In the West many critics worry that Jews and Jewish culture in Soviet Russia are doomed because of assimilation and intermarriage. However, many Jews in Birobijan deny that Jewish or Yiddish culture is dying out. They claim the opposite is true. They do admit that intermarriage is brisk but they term this 'normal' and 'progressive'.

"One night in Birobijan I watched a rehearsal of a play in Yiddish by Sholom Aleichem, a Jewish writer who died in 1916. ...

"A Yiddish newspaper is published five times weekly. A radio program is broadcast daily in Yiddish. There is a monthly Yiddish literary journal published in Moscow which circulates in Birobijan. ...

"One Birobijan Jew told me that the decisive fact about the Jewish Autonomous Region is that it exists and thrives and is growing each year."

The Canadian journalist Alain Patrie paid special attention to cultural matters when he came to Birobijan. He published his observations in the *Canadian Tribune* under the eloquent heading "Yiddish culture is kept alive in Soviet Birobijan". He wrote:

"... My meeting with the editorial board of the newspaper *Birobijaner Shtern* takes place in an upper floor office. ... They have gathered in deference to my request for an interview. I am delighted. I have come a long way to inquire into the conditions of Jews in

the Soviet Union and Jews in Birobijan. ...The creation of the first Jewish state formation was a miracle of socialism. Soviet power gave upwards of 50,000 Jews land and self government, for the first time in 2,000 years."

In answer to one of Patrie's questions the paper's editor said: "Jews of the Soviet Union are equal citizens. We can live and work wherever we wish. There is no Jew who wants to return to the 'pale', to the ghetto, to discrimination, to second class citizen, to unequal opportunity."

Then the Canadian journalist described his talk with the paper's Editor-in-Chief.

"The poet Leonid Shkolnik is a sober sort. His hair is a heavy cloud of white. He questions me about Jews in Canada. Do they like poetry? My mind thrashes about. The poet tells me he enjoys the works of the Montreal writer Sholom Shtern. His poems are available throughout the country. Is he popular in Canada?

"I am at a loss for explanation."

An eloquent admission. This passage of the article testifies better than any other words to the cultural development, the spiritual outlook of Soviet people, of our contemporaries, to their erudition. To us this is something natural. For those who have come to examine and compare, it is a discovery, a miracle.

There are many such revelations made by people who visit our country.

"As for Birobijan, it has surpassed all my expectations," Samuel Aroneff told Soviet newsmen. His parents emigrated from Russia to the United States before the 1917 October Revolution in search of bread and work, in the hope of finding a better life. Samuel Aroneff became and engineer and in the early years of

Soviet government even came to the Soviet Union as a specialist to help build factories. In 1975 Samuel Aroneff visited Birobijan and on his return to the United States published a booklet about his trip.

In 1979 Samuel Aroneff again travelled to the banks of the Bira to collect material for a new book and a script for a documentary film about the Soviet Union and the Jewish Autonomous Region. On his departure Aroneff said that even in the four years since his first visit Birobijan and the Region had achieved much in terms of housing, economic development and culture. But the main thing that impressed the US journalist was the people's confidence in the future.

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

At the Party Committee of the Jewish Autonomous Region I spoke to Lev Shapiro.

His life is typical of his generation. He was born in 1927 into a Jewish family in the settlement of Seredina-Buda in the Ukraine. When he finished secondary school he went to Moscow where he studied at the Institute of Steel and Alloys. Upon graduation he asked to be sent to the Soviet Far East. There he worked as a foreman and as the superintendent of an open-hearth shop. Since 1966 Shapiro has been a party official. In 1970 he was elected the head of the party organization of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

Lev Shapiro is an alternate member of the CPSU Central Committee, a deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet; he has been awarded orders and medals by the Soviet government.

"Tell me, what is the Region's economy like today," I asked.

"We have 50 different industrial enterprises, the leading one being the Dalselmash plant. Our building facilities are growing; we now have a silicate brick factory and factories manufacturing reinforced-concrete elements and large prefabricated panels.

"The city of Birobijan, with its population of 75,000, is known as the centre of the Soviet Far East's light industry. Small wonder, because in Birobijan we have a hose and knitted wear factory which manufactures 39 million pairs of socks, stockings and tights a year, and also the footwear, garments and another knitted goods factories.

"Gross industrial output today is 35 times the 1934 figure, and each year more factories open.

"Major building work is going on in the villages. The Region has 38 large mechanized state farms, two collective farms, a modern poultry farm, an experimental agricultural farm and a land improvement trust. They cover over 160,000 hectares, and there are more than 3,000 tractors, nearly 1,300 combine harvesters and many other machines to work them. The economic achievements of the working people of the Region would have been impossible without the help of other parts of the country. The links between our Region and other areas would form a fine grid if drawn on a map. We send industrial goods to the Ukraine, Byelorussia, the Maritime Territory in the north, Kazakhstan and also abroad, and we receive raw materials and other supplies from Kabardino-Balkaria, Buryatia, Tataria, Latvia, Georgia, and so on.

"The workers' settlement Teploozersk near the biggest cement plant in the Far East is growing. Eight

kilometres away is the Londokovsky slaked lime plant which in two or three years will increase its output three or four times, to 1.5 million tons a year.

"Another new community is the miners' town of Khingansk. The big tin mines there are increasing their output each year and the new Beryozovy mine is being built.

"A new, unique brucite deposit is being mined. Iron ore deposits have been found.

"Not far from Teploozersk there is another unique enterprise, a salmon breeding farm.

"More new enterprises are being designed and built and many old ones are expanding. During the 11th five-year period (1981-1985) the capacity of the region's thermal power stations will double, the Dalselmash plant will step up production by 30 per cent, a big hothouse complex will be built, as well as a feeding farm for 10,000 cattle and a big state farm to produce feed."

"Statistics tell us that people of 70 nationalities live in our Region. When I visited the United States with a delegation from the USSR Supreme Soviet or met foreign delegations visiting our country I was often asked how we manage to maintain national compatibility and good-neighbourly relations among so many nationalities within a relatively small region. I have explained, and I repeat now, that we have nothing to 'maintain'. Unity and good neighbourliness are inherent not only in the common destiny of the entire Soviet people but above all in the very social and economic foundations of the Soviet system, such as no private ownership of the means of production, no division into rich and poor, and equal rights granted by the Constitution of the USSR. So racial or national prejudice cannot develop.

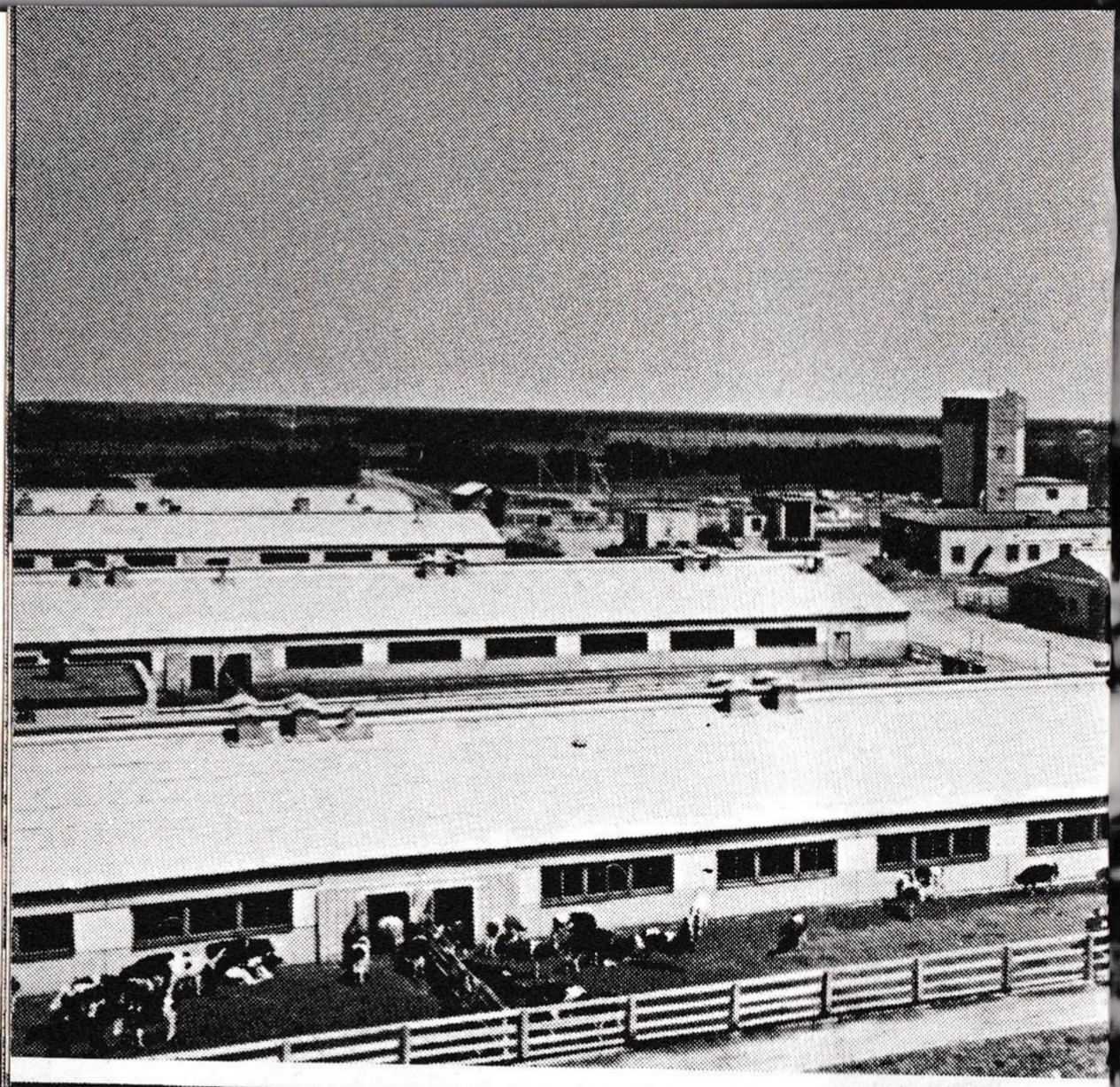
The city of Birobijan was founded in 1928 on the site of the small railway station Tikhonkaya deep in the taiga; today it is a major industrial and cultural centre.

In the city park.

The Jewish Automonous Region has two newspapers, *Birobijaner Shtern* in Yiddish and the *Birobijan Star* in Russian.

Lev Shapiro is an alternate member of the CPSU Central Committee, Deputy to the USSR Supreme Soviet and first secretary of the Party Committee of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

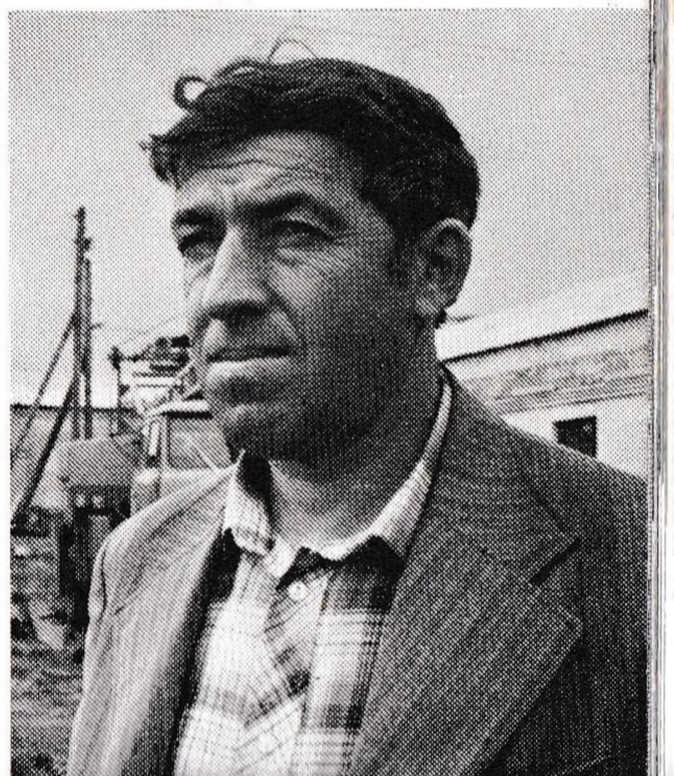
Editor-in-Chief Leonid Shkolnik (centre) and his colleagues discussing the next issue of *Birobijaner Shtern*.



The Golovinsky livestock complex in the Jewish Autonomous Region.

Anastasia Zhiltsova is a herdswoman at the "Legacy of Lenin" collective farm.

Boris Rak is the deputy chairman of the managing board of the "Legacy of Lenin" collective farm.



Feiga Faiman (left) one of the best vegetable growers at the "Legacy of Lenin" collective farm, with her team.

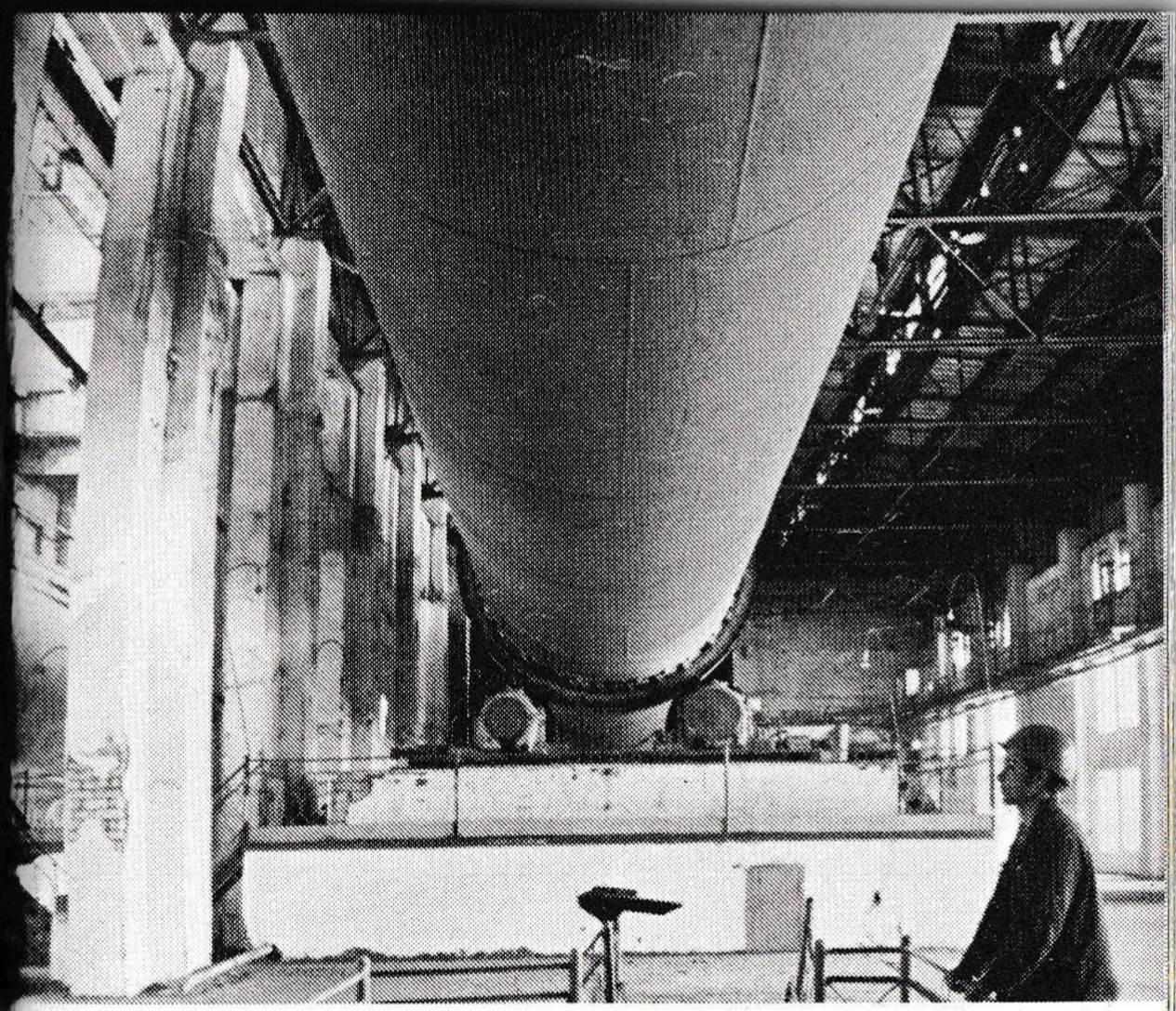
The feed factory in Birobijan.

Maize harvesting on the fields of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

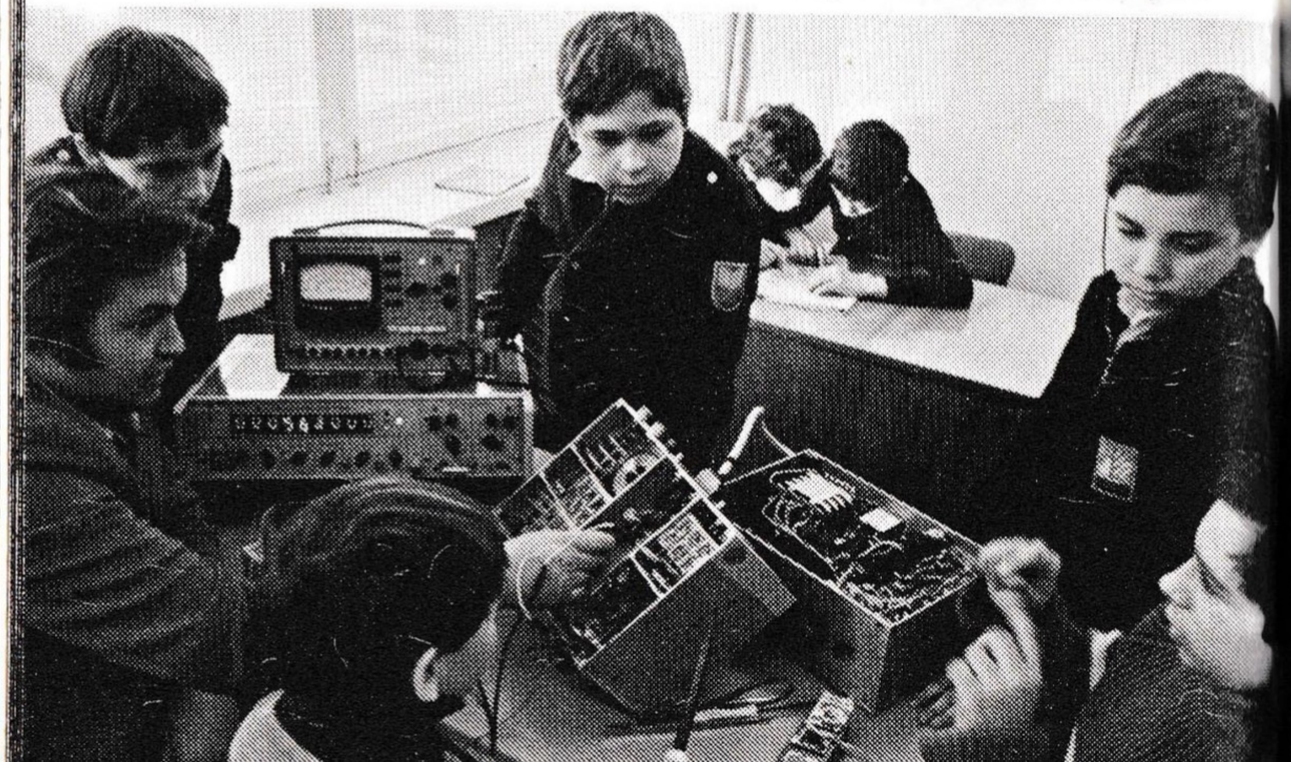
Packing fern.

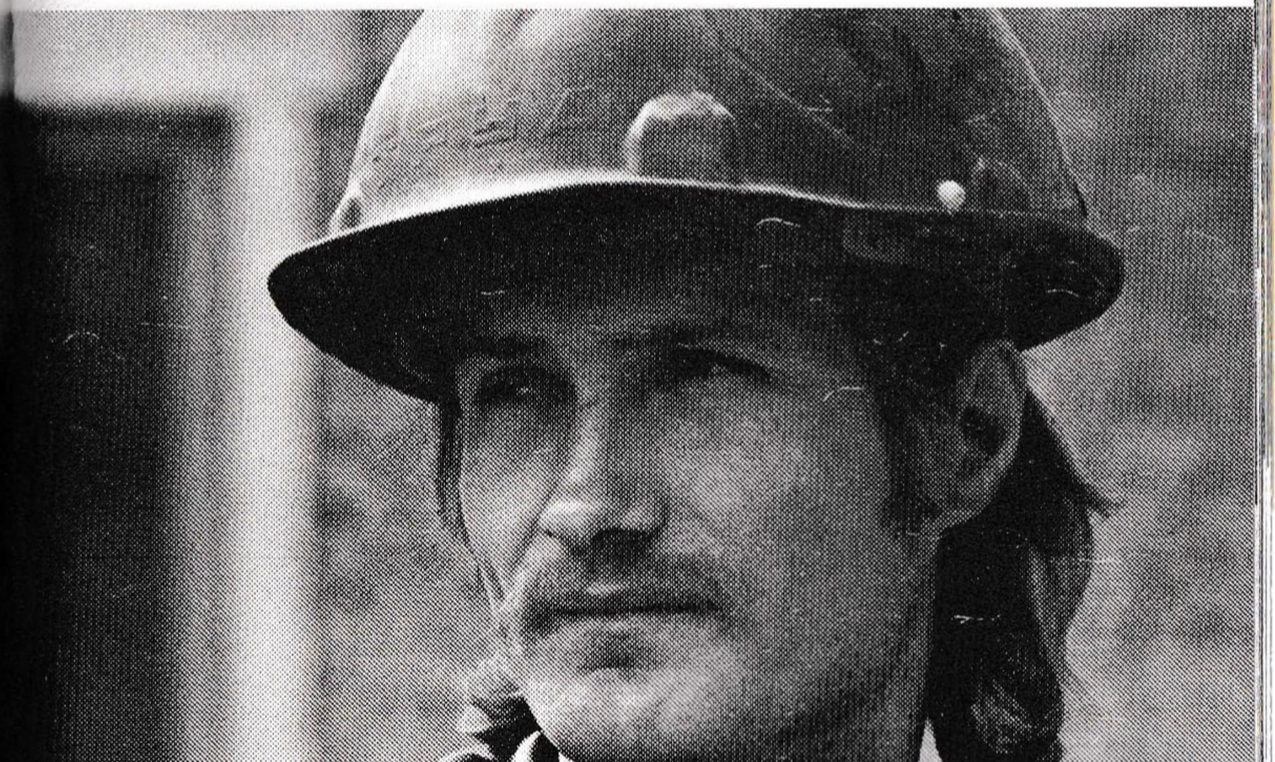
A lesson at a Birobijan school.

Young technicians at the Palace of Young Pioneers in Birobijan.



At the Teploozersk cement factory. Vladimir Shlyak (bottom) is a fitter at the plant's repair shop.





At the special-care unit in the regional hospital.

David Dik is a programmer and setter-up of preset-controlled machine tools at the Dalselmash plant.

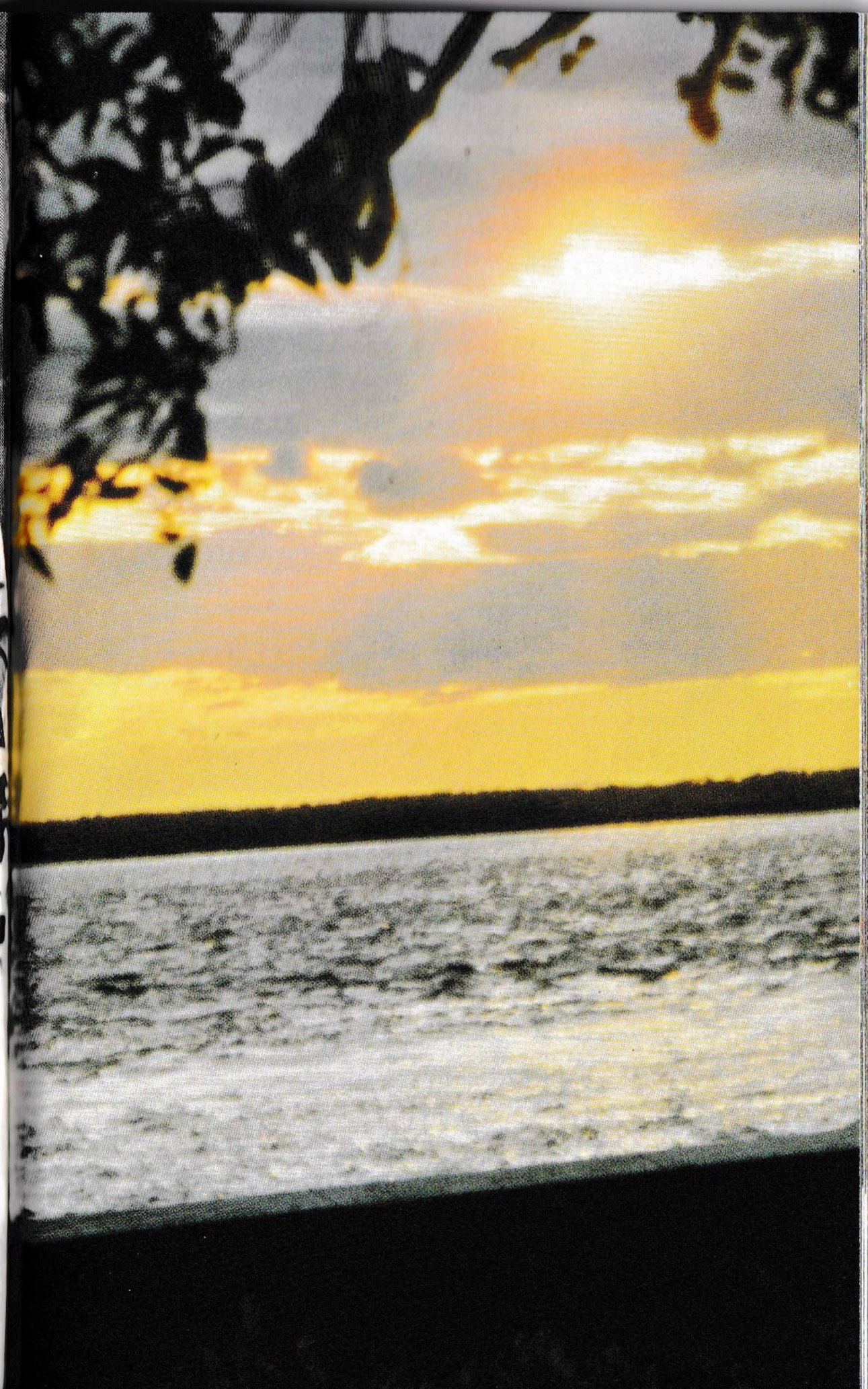
At the design office of the Dalselmash plant.

The *Jungkeit* (Youth) amateur ensemble at the Birobijan mechanical secondary school.

Artistes from the Jewish Chamber Music Theatre before a rehearsal.

Mikhail Shein from the Jewish Folk Theatre in Sholom Aleichem's play *Tevje the Milkman*.

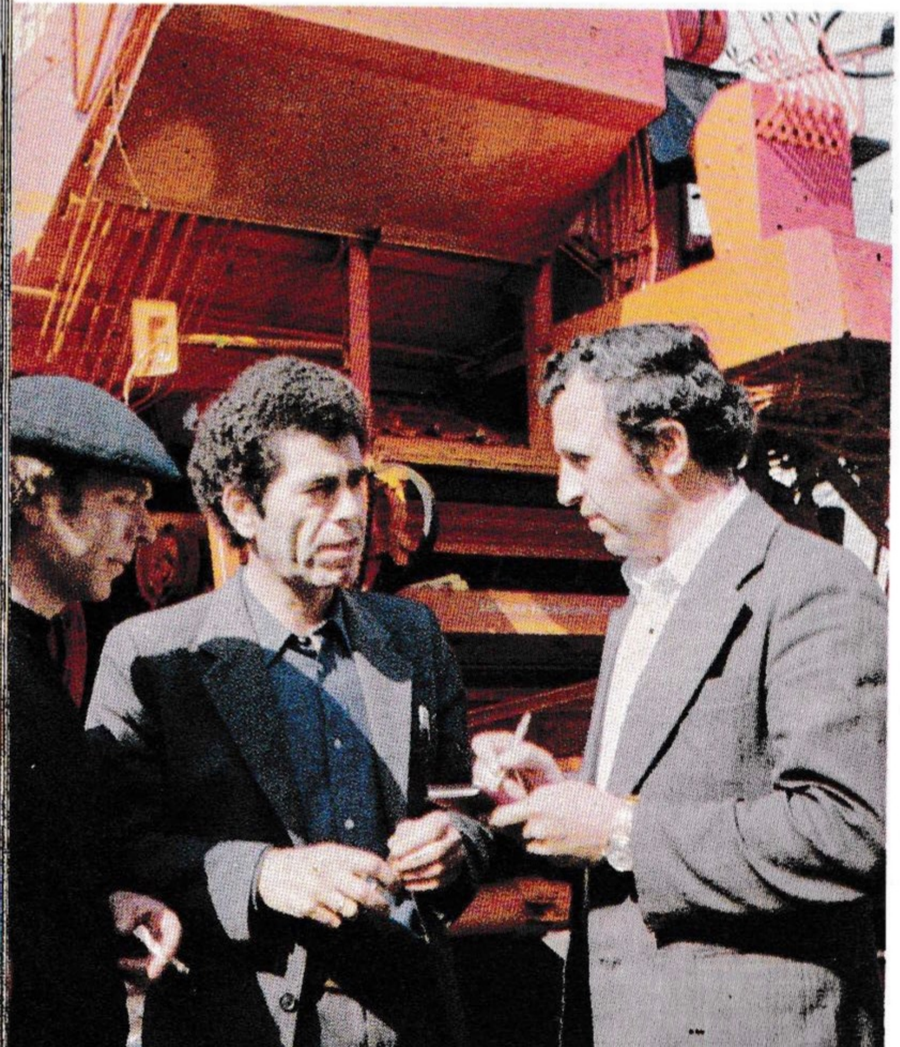
At the Birobijan synagogue.

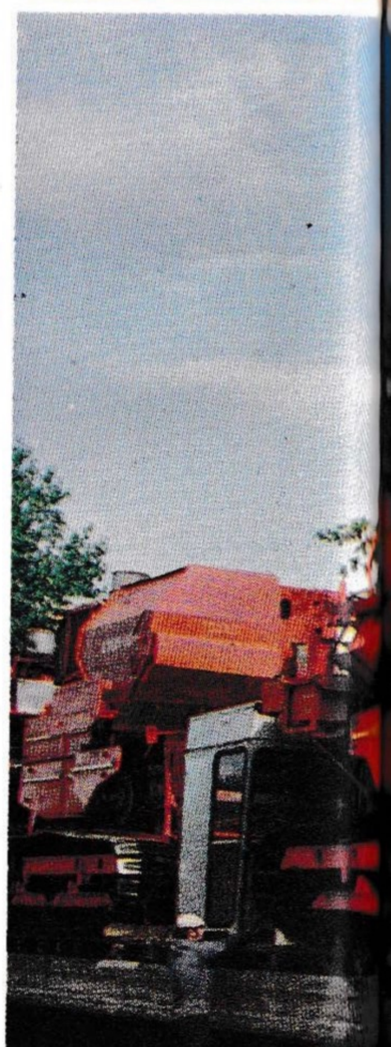


Sunset on the Amur.

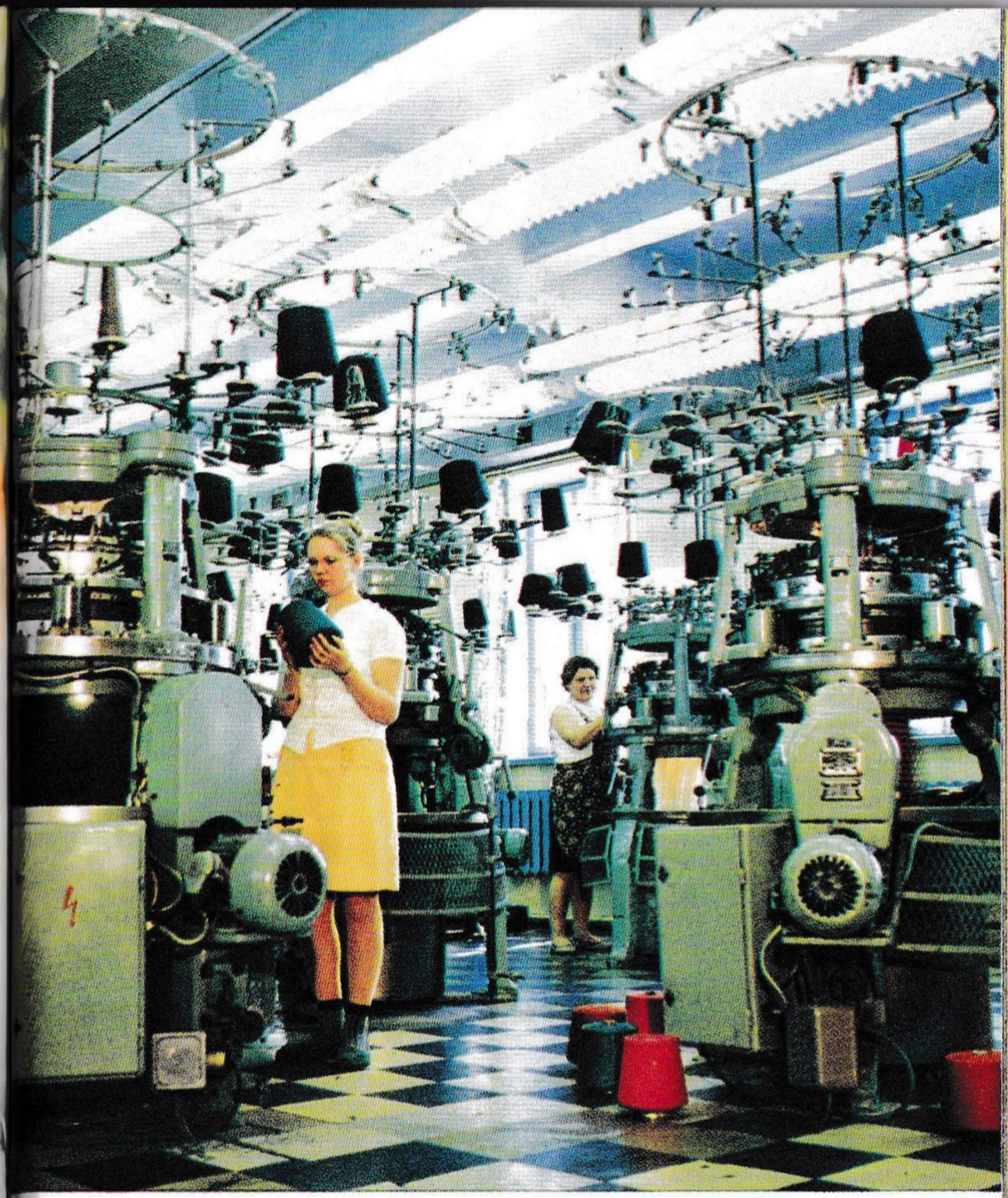
The building of the CPSU Committee of the Jewish Autonomous Region.

After the war a small factory of lorry and tractor trailers was founded in Birobijan; in 1960 it expanded to become the first farm-machinery factory in the Far East, the Dalselmash plant, now the leading industrial enterprise in the Region.





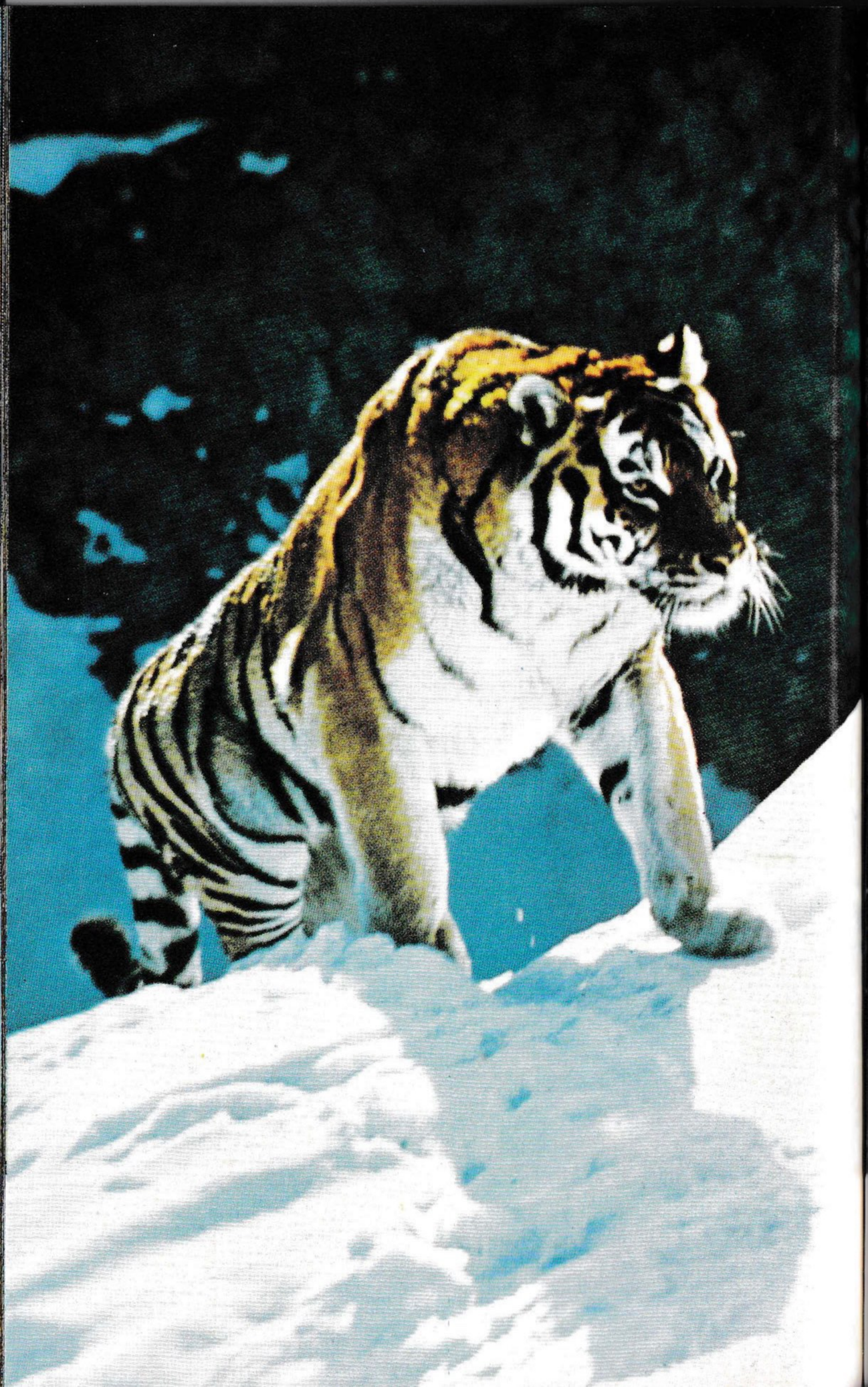
At an assembly line at the Birobijan shoe factory.



In one of the shops of the Birobijan knitted-wear factory.

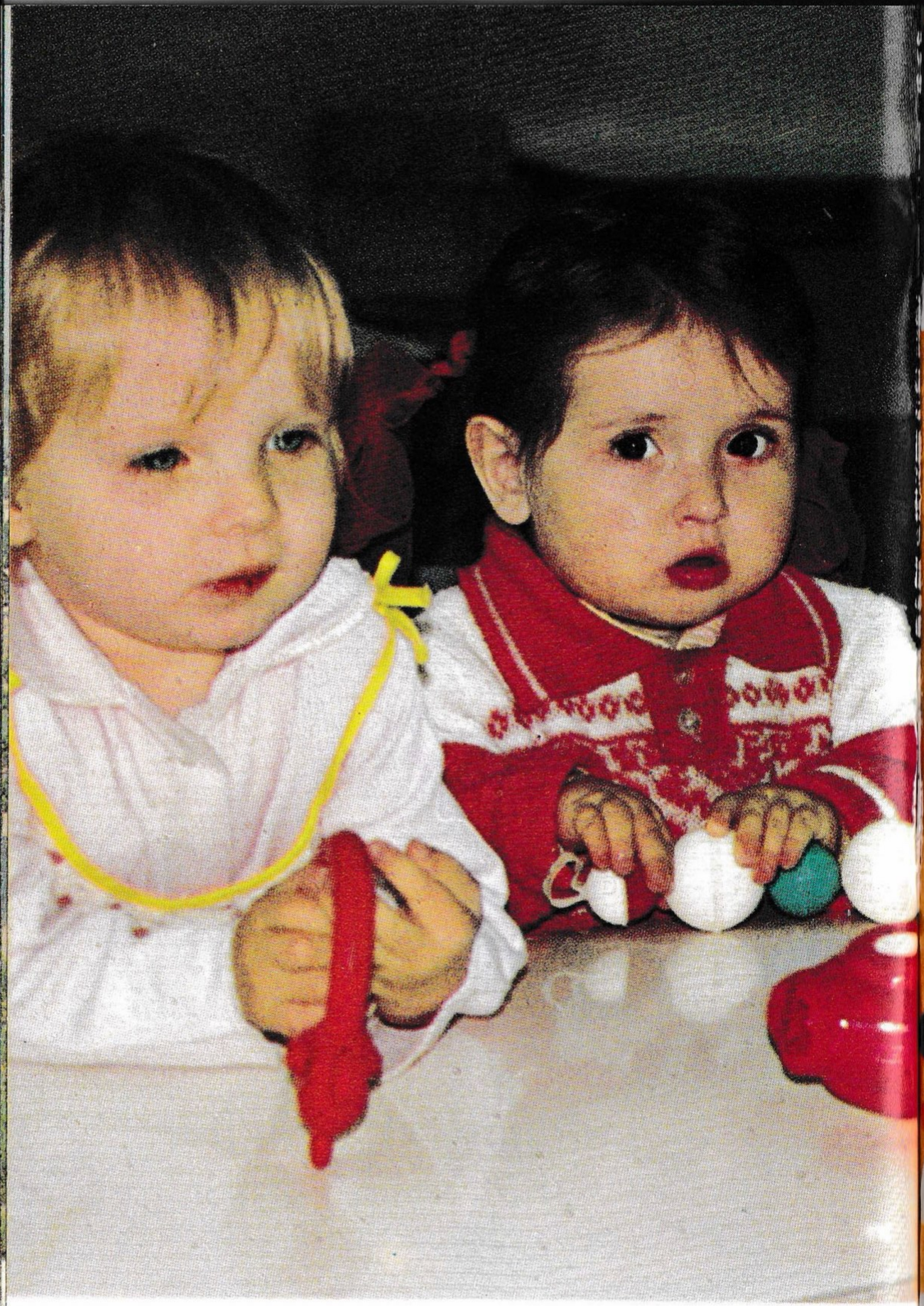
Yelena Arnapolina is a sewing machine operator at the Birobijan hose factory. She is a member of the bureau of the city Party committee and a member of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions; in 1983 she was awarded the title of Hero of Socialist Labour.

The dance troupe from the House of Culture of the Birobijan garments factory performing the Jewish dance Masltov (Congratulations).



The Jewish Autonomous Region is rich in natural resources. The Ussuri tiger, listed in the Red Book of protected animals, roams its forests. The Amur has one hundred and six species of fish.

Birobijan today.



In a Birobijan nursery.

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The Soviet Union publishes the works of Jewish writers and poets in bigger editions than any other country.

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